WHERE THE SHEKHINAH DWELLS: THE COMPASSIONATE FACE OF GOD IN SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

A Practical Research Project

Presented to

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Ministry

by

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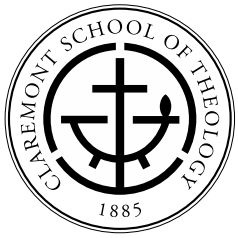

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ABSTRACT

Where the Shekhinah Dwells: The Compassionate Face of God in Spiritual Direction

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Spiritual direction is, by nature, a practice which invites the Divine into relationship with the seeker (the directee) and the companion (the director). The traditional model of spiritual direction speaks of three chairs, one for God, one for the directee, and one for the director. Oftentimes, a part of one's spiritual journey is discerning who or what God means to them and how they may need to reimagine God if the language of childhood or earlier adulthood is a barrier to their spiritual wellbeing. While there are many names for God in Jewish tradition, the Shekhinah is the one most widely known as representing both the feminine aspect of God and the immanence of God. While it may seem essential to include such an important God concept in spiritual direction training, particularly Jewish spiritual direction training, there is little evidence to support the Shekhinah being a core component of any training program, past or current.

This project seeks to explore the Shekhinah as a compassionate source of the Divine in Jewish tradition and how this concept reveals itself in the practice of spiritual direction. The research seeks to contribute to a better understanding of how the concept of the Shekhinah is helpful for the practice of spiritual direction and where there may be a need to more explicitly teach about the Shekhinah and compassion-based spiritual care in Jewish and interfaith spiritual direction training programs.

Through individual interviews with ten spiritual directors, participants are invited to engage in interpersonal dialogue and text study about the Shekhinah, noting ways in which traditional text has resonated in their personal experience with spiritual direction or may be helpful in potential future training programs. Participants are also invited to share any

meaningful ways in which the Shekhinah has been a source of sustenance in their own spiritual journeys. Foundational to the project is the notion that compassion is at the heart of spiritual direction. In his book *Practicing Compassion*, Frank Rogers writes, "Genuine compassion is free and generous, abundant and restorative." So too authentic spiritual direction flows freely from the Spirit of God and is based on generosity of heart, abundance of love, and restoration to the soul. This project seeks to be a resource to integrate compassionate spiritual care with the Shekhinah's loving embrace.

With abundant gratitude

to Dr. Frank Rogers

For the way in which he teaches and embodies the compassion practice,

and

to Rabbi Lavey Derby

For his wise companionship and counsel.

Zsuzsi, *zichronah livracha,* would be delighted.

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"Shekhinah is the light closest to God and yet is accessible in some way to human consciousness."
— Leah Novick[1]

"And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them."
— Exodus 25:8 (Jewish Publication Society TANAKH Translation)

[1] Leah Novick, *On the Wings of Shekhinah: Rediscovering Judaism's Divine Feminine* (Quest Books, 2008), 7.

Introduction

Ministry Need

This research recognizes that traditional masculine God language may limit the ways in which we experience the immanence of God, particularly in the realm of spiritual direction. When people are able to connect to the compassionate, accessible aspect of God, they may be better able to hold themselves with compassion and engage in healing work. The Shekhinah has not been a core component of Spiritual Direction training programs in the past, yet Her inclusion has the potential to help spiritual directors better meet their directees with compassion and have new language to do so.

Response to the Need

This research uses psychoeducation with Shekhinah text sources in the context of individual interviews to better understand if and how the Shekhinah has been explored in Spiritual Direction training programs. Understanding Shekhinah within Jewish text and tradition will help give language to the felt experience of the compassionate presence of God in spiritual direction. The hope is that by giving voice to the Shekhinah's presence, we will better understand how education around the Shekhinah could be useful in spiritual direction training programs, ultimately leading to more sacred, compassion-based care.

Significance of the Project

Context

In these complex and challenging times, we need compassion for ourselves and for one another. This project seeks to explore how we seek and respond to the compassionate presence of God, as embodied in the form of Shekhinah in Jewish literature. The Talmud says that the

Shekhinah rests above the head of a sick person.[2] This ancient teaching is indicative of the way the Shekhinah shows up, not just in times of happiness and joy, but also in times of pain and suffering. Her presence invites us into deeper connection, perhaps all the more so at points of struggle and questioning. I believe connecting with Her presence is one way in which we are called to live sacred, God-infused lives and to know that She is with us, even when She feels most far away.

The Talmud recounts the story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, who was hidden in a cave with his son for twelve years. When they emerged from the cave, they saw their community "forsaking eternal life to engage in things of the moment," understood to mean not studying Torah, praying, or fasting as they deemed proper.[3] When they looked at each of these things with judgment, they were consumed in fire. A heavenly voice proclaimed, "Do you wish to destroy My world? Return to your cave." One year later they returned to the earthly world, this time with compassion. We are told that wherever they went, the Rabbi and his son now brought blessing to the world. It is only with eyes of compassion that the world inhabits life. From this we learn that compassion literally sustains the world. The Shekhinah is the path of Divine compassion extended to humanity.

Rogers writes, "the path of compassion invites us to be liberated from the internal turbulence that disconnects us from our compassionate core."[4] He defines compassion as "genuine loving regard that flows freely from the heart."[5] Rogers continues, "Like the womb that receives and incubates with protective care, holding others' pain brings about life."[6] In Hebrew,

[2] Talmud Shabbat 12b.
[3] Shabbat 33b.
[4] Frank Rogers Jr., *Practicing Compassion* (Fresh Air Books, 2015), 13.
[5] Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 18.
[6] Rogers, *Practicing Compassion*, 26.

the word for compassion is *rachamim*, connected to the same Hebrew root as the word for womb, *rechem*. The Shekhinah is often known as the Divine mother, who holds all of Her children with compassion.

Rabbi Shai Held writes, "Since a shadow cannot appear without a presence that casts it, when we see a human being, it is as if we were beholding the divine presence (Shekhinah) itself."[7] As we are each made in the Divine image, we invite compassion for ourselves and for each other. Yet sometimes we need a compassionate source beyond ourselves to hold us with care. That compassionate presence can show up in the form of Shekhinah, who has been with the Jewish people in exile since the Temple was destroyed.

Jewish mysticism maintains that after the Temple was destroyed, the *Kadosh Baruch Hu*, the masculine presence of the Divine, left the earthly realm, dwelling in the loftiest heavens. The Shekhinah remained as the "sole worldly presence of holiness, compassion, and providence for the Jewish people."[8] Without a dwelling place, Zohar scholar Melila Hellner-Eshed suggests that the Shekhinah seeks to dwell in people's hearts.[9] Spiritual direction is a practice whereby people open their hearts to one another, clearing a path for the Divine to dwell in the open-heartedness.

"When two people sit and occupy themselves with words of Torah, Shekhinah rests among them."[10] So too when people sit together in spiritual direction, the Shekhinah may rest among them. Spiritual direction is a practice where we invite the Shekhinah to dwell in our

[7] Shai Held, *Judaism Is About Love: Recovering the Heart of Jewish Life* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2024), 164.
[8] Melila Heller-Eshed, *A River Flows from Eden: The Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar* (Stanford University Press, 2009), 116.
[9] Heller-Eshed, *A River Flows*, 116.
[10] Pirkei Avot 3:6, as cited in Heller-Eshed, 108.

hearts, to accompany us as we invite the compassionate presence of God into the moment, into the felt experience of bearing witness to another's soul journey.

Justification

In these divisive times, I believe the call is even greater to show up for one another with compassion. Spiritual direction is a compassion-based practice, but I have not heard it named that way in spiritual direction circles outside of Frank Roger's training specific to Internal Family Systems and Compassion Based Spiritual Direction.[11] By widening the access and language around compassion-based spiritual direction, I believe we can deepen the capacity to show up with compassion as directors and directees. While the Shekhinah is prevalent in different aspects of Jewish text, She is still an often-unknown concept in the mainstream Jewish world. I believe it is time to more fully reveal Her, to bring Her into the light, so that more people may benefit from Her loving care.

Audience

This exploration of Shekhinah will be available to spiritual directors who have completed formal spiritual direction training and are interested in compassion-based care. While initial outreach will be toward spiritual directors of Jewish faith, the study will be open to anyone interested in learning more about the Shekhinah in Jewish tradition and how Her energy may help bring greater compassion to the practice of spiritual direction.

Theological and Theoretical/Conceptual Stance

My theology is informed by the verse in Psalms which reads, "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted."[12] I believe that when our hearts are broken open, we have more direct access to

[11] Frank Rogers Jr., "Compassion-Based Soul Care: Internal Family Systems as a Model for Spiritual Companions," part 1 (unpublished manuscript, February–April 2024), PDF file.
[12] Psalms 34:19 (Jewish Publication Society TANAKH Translation, hereafter referred to as JPS TANAKH).

the Divine and to the hearts of one another. This theology is directly linked to the compassionate face of God, the Shekhinah, as Divine energy that can hold us in all ways, as a mother, as a companion, and as a lover even in our imperfections. She accompanies us in our broken-heartedness and companions the Jewish people in exile. The Talmud teaches, "Wherever they were exiled, the Shekhinah went with them."[13]

The concept of Shekhinah emerges from Torah, "And let them make for Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8, JPS TANAKH). This verse is standardly translated as God dwelling "among them," and comes from the Hebrew verb *lishkon*, to dwell. Shekhinah translated as the presence of God dwelling among us shifts that meaning from the original Hebrew, Shekhinah dwelling *within* us. In Deuteronomy, we read, "For the thing is very close to you, in your mouth, and in your heart, to observe it."[14] While this verse does not explicitly mention Shekhinah, or even God, it talks about the "thing," meaning *mitzvot,* including loving God with an open heart. This thing is noted to be in your mouth (*peh*) in addition to your heart. Perhaps this connection to the mouth is one way in which the Divine Mother shows herself in the connection and continuation of the mitzvot and relationship with God. Our mouths give birth to language, and when we speak, we engage in the act of creation and renewal. Proverbs states, "death and life are in the power of the tongue."[15] When we use life-giving, compassionate language, invoking the Shekhinah dwelling within us, we bring greater light to the world, and a sense of the holy into the practice of spiritual direction.

Limitations

The study will be limited by only hearing voices from a small segment of the spiritual

[13] Talmud Megillah 29a.
[14] Deuteronomy 30:14 (JPS TANAKH).
[15] Proverbs 18:21 (JPS TANAKH).

direction population. It is also limited by the lens through which I view Shekhinah as a progressive Jewish woman. The participants will be sharing based on their own personal experiences with Shekhinah as spiritual directors and may share more or less based on how well they trust me as the interviewer and facilitator. The information gathered will also vary based on participants' prior knowledge of and direct experience with Shekhinah literature.

Chapter One

Shekhinah in Jewish History

This chapter will include the history of the Shekhinah in Jewish literature, including Her biblical roots, the development of the concept in the rabbinic period, as well as Her presence in the Zohar and mystical tradition. I will further explore how the Shekhinah shows up as a compassionate presence in exile and in times of struggle.

Biblical Roots

The word Shekhinah does not appear explicitly in the Bible. However, as noted above, it is commonly attributed to the Hebrew verb *lishkon*, to dwell, and is connected to the verse in Torah, "And let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them."[16] Melissa Raphael expands the meaning of dwelling when she notes that the root *shakhan* means "to be present or dwell as in a tabernacle, sanctuary, or tent… and the term was often used to denote God's presence in the desert camp or Temple."[17] The word *Mishkan*, which accompanied the Israeli people on their journey toward Israel, is also rooted in the verb *lishkon*. Gershom Scholem describes the *Mishkan* as "God's dwelling in the tabernacle or Temple."[18] Thus the Shekhinah is connected to the Mishkan, the dwelling place of God.

Shekhinah is a grammatically feminine word in Hebrew but does not denote the feminine presence of God in the biblical period. Rather, it "indicates the sense of being in a sacred place," which Raphael believes is established "wherever Jews are encamped in the barren wilderness around them."[19] This idea of sacredness in places that are barren provides a beautiful foundation

[16] Exodus 25:8 (JPS TANAKH).
[17] Melissa Raphael, *The Female Face of God in Auschwitz* (Routledge, 2003), 82.
[18] Gershom Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah* (Schocken Books, 1991), 147.
[19] Raphael, *Female Face of God*, 82.

for the practice of spiritual direction. The concept of the Shekhinah continued to evolve as She was explored in different historical contexts.

Rabbinic Period

The Rabbinic period emerged after the destruction of the second Temple in 70 CE. Without a physical structure to house God, God's presence was now "marked by God's people, Israel, who carry God's presence with them"[20] The Talmud states, "Come and see how beloved Israel is before God; for wherever they went into exile the Shekhinah went with them. When they were exiled to Egypt, the Shekhinah went with them, in Babylon the Shekhinah was with them, and in the future, when Israel will be redeemed, the Shekhinah will be with them."[21] The accompaniment of God with the people of Israel into exile is an important theme in Rabbinic literature and creates the foundation to believe that the Shekhinah accompanies us in our suffering. Norman Cohen explores this theme when he writes, "The Rabbis also pictured God as being accessible to Israel no matter what its predicament."[22] Rather than focusing on a distant judgmental God, the Rabbis presented us with a God who is present with us through our very belovedness.

Cohen furthers this claim to highlight that the Shekhinah is there regardless of Israel's "sinfulness" and "impurity." Because Israel and God are in a state of relationship, with Israel being beloved to God, the Shekhinah is seen as an ever-present accessible aspect of Divinity that dwells with them at all times. Furthermore, Cohen shares quotes from the rabbinic text Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer, explaining that God appeared to Moses in the thornbush, a place of "grief and

[20] Raphael, *Female Face of God*, 82.
[21] Talmud Megillah 29a.
[22] Norman J. Cohen, "Shekhinta Ba-galuta: A Midrashic Response to Destruction and Persecution," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 13, no. 1-2 (1982): 148.

distress" because when God sees Israel's grief, God is called to dwell with them there.[23] The Mekhilata d'Rabbi Ishmael, a midrash on the book of Exodus, quotes scripture, saying "He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him, I will be with him in trouble."[24] God desires to be with the people in their imperfect, exiled, suffering state, but God needs an immanent presence to accompany and meet them there.

The Shekhinah is the immanence of God that can meet us in our state of exile. The promise is that Shekhinah will also return with the people to a state of *shleimut*, holy completeness, in the future, "bring[ing] them up again."[25] Furthermore, Vayiqra Rabbah 32:8, a midrash on the book of Leviticus, notes that the Holy One says "it shall be My task to comfort them."[26] Shekhinah is seen as a source of comfort for the people, dating back to Rabbi Akiba of the first and second century, who held the view that because God is compassionate and loving, the Shekhinah is always present and shares Israel's suffering in exile."[27] The Shekhinah of these texts is not identified as feminine or separate from God, but the way in which God's immanence is revealed.

Raphael writes, "Rabbinic literature has an 'unshakeable belief' in the indwelling presence of God among the daily life of the people of Israel."[28] The Shekhinah in this time period was often associated with studying holy texts, which was traditionally done by men in scholarly relationships with other men; there is nothing inherently feminine about the Shekhinah in the rabbinic period. We learn that "when two people sit and occupy themselves with words of Torah, Shekhinah rests among them," and only later could this text be reclaimed by Jewish

[23] Cohen, "Shekhinta Ba-galuta," 150.
[24] Cohen, 151.
[25] Cohen, 153.
[26] Cohen, 154.
[27] Raphael, *Female Face of God*, 82.
[28] Raphael, 82.

feminists as they too pursued the right to engage in text study.[29] Regardless of gender, in times of great trauma and exile, the rabbis sought ways to know that God was still with them; the indwelling, immanent presence of the Shekhinah became the comfort of knowing God in this psychological and physical exiled state.

Raphael Patai quotes rabbinic scholars who affirm that the Shekhinah's presence in the ancient Temple was to line it with love.[30] This is yet another reminder that love, *chesed*, unconditional loving-kindness, is foundational to the Shekhinah's presence in the world. She can offer us the same love that She embodied in the Temple, holding us in Her compassionate embrace, just as She embraced the Temple through lining the walls with love.

The Talmud states that the Shekhinah "joins the sick to comfort them."[31] Patai further quotes a beautiful passage by Rabbi Akiba, indicating that the Shekhinah cares deeply for "repentant sinners." He writes "[They] are accepted by the Shekhina as if they were righteous and pious persons who never sinned. They are carried aloft and seated next to the Shekhina… He whose heart is broken and whose spirit is low, and whose mouth rarely utters a word, the Shekhina walks with him every day…"[32] Jewish tradition emphasizes that God is close to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18, Jewish Publication Society) and through our brokenheartedness, we come to be in relationship with the Shekhinah.

Zohar / Kabbalah

The Shekhinah emerged as the female aspect of God in kabbalistic literature in the late twelfth century. At this time, mystics began to speak of the Shekhinah as separate from the *Kadosh Baruch Hu*, the Holy Blessed One, the masculine, transcendent aspect of God. Scholem

[29] Pirkei Avot 3:6, as cited in Heller-Eshed, 108.
[30] Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* (Wayne State University Press, 1990), 100.
[31] Talmud Shabbat 12b.
[32] Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 103.

quotes Judah he-Hasid of the twelfth century when he says, "The Shekhinah threw herself down before the Holy One blessed be He,"[33] thus creating a framework to separate the masculine presence of God from the feminine presence of God. The Shekhinah further becomes inherently feminine when She is incorporated into the Sefirot system of Kabbalah as the tenth Sefirah (*Malkhut*), closest to earth, representing mother, bride, and daughter.[34] Hellner-Eshed explains, "*Malkhut* is also Shekhinah, the feminine, motherly divinity that dwells among human beings in this world through their loving interrelationship."[35] Kabbalah teaches that the separation between Shekhinah and the *Kadosh Baruch Hu*, Her Beloved, the masculine energy of God, leads to energetic separation in the universe. Part of our journey on earth is to help restore the relationship between the feminine and masculine aspects of God.

As in the rabbinic period, the Shekhinah was not attached to a particular sacred place. In the medieval period, She became representative of the collective body of Israel.[36] The Zohar, the fundamental text of Jewish mysticism, expounds on the rabbinic concept that no place is empty of the Shekhinah. The Shekhinah is present not only in mundane places, but She is present for the matriarchs of the Jewish people. We learn, "Every single day, Rebecca saw the radiance of the Shekhinah in her dwelling and prayed there"[37] and "the Shekhinah never departed from the tent of Leah or the tent of Rachel. … The truth is that during the lives of Leah and Rachel the Shekhinah hovered over them."[38]

Jewish mysticism connects Shekhinah to birth, beginnings, and creative power. "Shekhinah… is the full expression of ceaseless creative power - it is receptive, to be sure, but is

[33] Scholem, *On The Mystical Shape*, 152.
[34] Scholem, 160.
[35] Hellner-Eshed, 35.
[36] Raphael, *Female Face of God*, 153.
[37] Zohar 1:33a.
[38] Zohar 1:175b.

spontaneously and incessantly transformed into an element that gives birth, as the stream of eternally flowing divine life enters into it."[39] Scholem names "Shekhinah … as a garden in which all plantings grow, as a pool fed by springs, as a sea into which the rivers flow, as a shrine and a treasure-house in which the treasures of life and all the secrets of the Torah are kept – and a hundred other images."[40] Perhaps there are so many images of Shekhinah in mystical tradition so that we may be better able to remember Her and access Her presence in myriad ways.

While some believed the Shekhinah was exiled after the destruction of the Second Temple and could only return with the Messiah, Raphael claims that "for most She remained a source of consolation, both in and with Israel in their exile."[41]

Contemporary

Raphael notes that "By the 17th century, Shekhinah had been configured as a woman mourning for and comforting her people. In 18th and 19th century Hasidic theology, She suffers not only with the whole Jewish people, but with each Jewish soul."[42] Hasidism teaches that we can connect with *HaShem* (another name for the masculine God) through a relationship with the feminine aspect of God, Shekhinah. The Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, understood how deeply people needed a personal, healing connection to a Divine source. "The Shekhinah, the felt presence of the Divine, was spoken of as the Beloved, the Bride, … the lost Princess, for whom all of Israel was yearning."[43] As the configuration of a woman, Shekhinah has helped women see themselves in the Divine image and has been embraced by progressive feminist movements in modern times.

[39] Scholem, *On The Mystical Shape*, 174.
[40] Scholem, 176.
[41] Raphael, *Female Face of God*, 153.
[42] Raphael, 153.
[43] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 81.

Raphael explicitly notes ways in which the patriarchal model of God failed Israel during the *Shoah* (the Holocaust) and instead explores how God's immanence can be experienced through the Shekhinah, specifically through the lens of a feminist theology. I love when Raphael notes that "hiddenness implies presence."[44] So often we think that when God is hidden from us, we cannot experience God's Self, and fear God may not exist at all. Yet, if Divinity is hidden, it must exist. Raphael uses this logic to assume the Shekhinah is with Israel in their suffering even when they are unable to directly see or experience Her.

Shoshana Fershtman quotes mystical scholar Scholem when he says, "great epochs of mysticism often arose in times of historical crisis."[45] I wonder, is pain a way to break open our hearts and allow greater access to the Divine? Through our brokenheartedness, does the Shekhinah have greater access to be known to our hearts and our souls? Fershtman also quotes Rabbi Gershon Winkler, who says, "Judaism, originally a shamanic mystery tradition, cloaked itself in formal religious garb in an attempt to survive in a hostile climate."[46]

We have lived through a million moments and eras of forgetting and remembering, forgetting what is essential, and then being called back by the Shekhinah, to the source of connection, to God, to *shefa*, the flow of life. Perhaps this is the core of who we are without the many cloaks veiling our innate light, as the Source of mystery, of feminine Divine energy, courses through our veins. She must be allowed to flow from the Source without blocking Her energy through fear of opening our hearts. To fully receive Torah, each person must go through their own journey of suffering, "in which they are personally prepared as vessels open to

[44] Raphael, *Female Face of God*, 6.
[45] Shoshana Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus in Jungian Perspective: Transforming Trauma and the Wellsprings of Renewal* (Routledge, 2021), 21.
[46] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 29.

receiving revelation."[47] The practice of spiritual direction, with awareness of Shekhinah's presence, helps open our hearts to more fully access Divine companionship and reveal the longings of our souls.

[47] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 72.

Chapter Two

Spiritual Direction and Shekhinah

In this chapter, I will explore themes of spiritual direction as they relate to the study of the Shekhinah. Spiritual direction is a sacred encounter that creates space for the immanent presence of God to dwell. Spiritual directors are trained to listen for the still small voice of God and to help directees discern where sparks of holiness reside in their own lives. The practice is designed to be one of *chesed*, unconditional loving kindness, inviting gentle discernment in the context of sacred companionship.

Spiritual Direction in the Jewish Community

Spiritual direction in the progressive Jewish community is a relatively recent phenomenon, with American Jewish training programs opening in the very early 2000s to meet the needs of spiritually-seeking Jews.[48] Yet the role of spiritual guide also appears in Torah, having been fulfilled by priests and prophets,[49] and direct spiritual guidance is abundant in ancient Jewish texts, including in the Psalms, the Talmud, and myriad aspects of kabbalah. Another aspect of formal Jewish spiritual mentorship dates to the Hasidic world in Europe, where a *mashgiach*, spiritual guide, would be responsible for the moral and spiritual development of his students. This concept of traditional Hasidic spiritual guidance was more directive in nature, with the Rebbe, or *mashgiach*, holding authority and bearing responsibility for advice-giving. This is in contrast to contemporary spiritual direction, which emphasizes contemplation and spiritual exploration intentionally without an agenda to fix or provide advice.

[48] Howard Avruhm Addison and Barbara Eve Breitman, "Introduction: To Revitalize the Spirit of God; Toward a Contemporary Practice of Jewish Spiritual Direction," in *Jewish Spiritual Direction: An Innovative Guide from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*, ed. Howard Avruhm Addison and Barbara Eve Breitman (Jewish Lights, 2006), xxvi.
[49] Addison and Breitman, "Introduction," xxvi.

Barbara Breitman and Rabbi Howard Avruhm Addison write that because "normative Judaism emphasizes Torah study and observing mitzvot as the legitimate pathways to God, many Jews may feel uncomfortable with the idea that we can have an unmediated, personal relationship with that Divine."[50] Traditional Judaism emphasized text study through a Jewish legal lens in order to understand how we should behave in the world. The *Shulkam Arukh*, a code of Jewish law, was published in the 1500s and soon became an essential composition by its very nature of telling people how to behave. The common belief was that in order to be close to God, you must observe the *mitzvot*.

Rabbi Lavey Derby explains that the Ba'al Shem Tov, the mystical leader of the 1700s, preached a different path; he deeply believed that in order to have a relationship with God, you did not have to be a Torah scholar, nor did you have to be literate, as most Jews in Eastern Europe were not.[51] He taught that people may have a profound relationship with God by nature of experiencing the Holy presence in their lives. The feeling of God's presence, and the intention brought to the experience, superseded simply following Jewish law. This, of course, elicited strong opposition from the traditional Jewish establishment, who feared potential dangers in encouraging people to have their own relationship with the Divine. The *mashgiach*, then, could help hasidim find their path to experience God, while still offering directive guidance within the safe confines of Jewish law.

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, founder of the Jewish renewal movement, published his study on counseling in Hasidism in the early 1990s.[52] He wrote about how rabbis would meet individually in private sessions with seekers. The first Jewish spiritual direction book,

[50] Addison and Breitman, "Introduction," xix.
[51] Lavey Derby, video conversation with author, January 27, 2026.
[52] Zalman Meshullam Schachter-Shalomi, *Spiritual Intimacy: A Study of Counseling in Hasidism* (Jason Aronson, 1991).

edited by Addison and Breitman, was published in 2006.[53] In the introduction, they each share personal experiences of trauma that led them to seek deeper spiritual understanding. They give credit to non-Jewish institutes, namely the Alban Institute and the Shalem Institute, for providing resources needed for healing and for learning the art of spiritual direction. Addison attributes Hasidism for helping him find Jewish language for spiritual direction. Breitman learned about Jewish mysticism in the early 1970s in college, then became active in renewal communities, which also provided foundations for the emergence of Jewish spiritual direction.

Without delving further into the complicated nature of Jewish history, Hasidism, and Jewish law, it is clear that contemporary Jewish spiritual direction emerged from a sense of spiritual longing that had previously been unfulfilled by traditional Judaism. The personal reclaiming of contemporary Jewish spiritual direction has perhaps been a response to spiritual seeking, oftentimes interwoven with trauma, and encounters with Jewish mystics along the way. The Shekhinah may have been lost in these Herculean efforts to simply reclaim an immanent God over the centuries of an intellectualized and hierarchical Judaism. Jewish spiritual training programs may have been sub-consciously resistant to intentionally including the Shekhinah in their curriculum as they have cautiously approached the realm of the immanent, accessible, personal, loving God. Perhaps the time is now to more fully reveal Her.

Shekhinah as Presence in Spiritual Direction

Spiritual direction calls us to be present to the unfolding of our lives and to the lives of our directees. Marvin Sweeney reminds us that, "The divine presence of G-d in the finite world is identified as the Shekhinah."[54] When we call God's presence into a spiritual direction session,

[53] Howard Avruhm Addison and Barbara Eve Breitman, eds., *Jewish Spiritual Direction: An Innovative Guide from Traditional and Contemporary Sources* (Jewish Lights, 2006).
[54] Marvin Sweeney, *Jewish Mysticism: From Ancient Times Through Today* (Eerdmans, 2020), 289.

we are also calling up Shekhinah, as the immanence of God, to be with us. Furthermore, we learn that "in kabbalistic thought, the Shekhinah manifests throughout the world of creation, including within each human being."[55] Through spiritual direction, we are invited to notice the presence of God within the director, the directee, and through the manifestation of God's Self. With the understanding that the Shekhinah is within each human being, we have a framework for the Divine spirit to shine through each person engaged in the process of spiritual direction. Rabbinic text affirms this idea when it states, "When two persons meet and exchange words of Torah, the Shechinah hovers over them."[56] Words of Torah can be expounded upon to mean the exchange of holy words or learning, thus inviting us to see the Shekhinah hovering over two people meeting to engage in spiritual direction.

Addison relays a teaching by the great Rabbi Moshe Chayim Luzzato, in his wondrous 17th century work *The Path of the Upright*, "How does one acquire Reverence? By contemplating two truths: The first is that the blessed Shechinah (Divine Presence) is found everywhere in the world and pays attention (*mashgiach*) to all things small and great."[57] Addison adds, "Therefore, to be a human *mashgiach*, the guide must also be attentive and present."[58] In Hebrew a supervisor is a *mashgiach*, and *mashgiach ruchani* is another term for spiritual guide. As the Shekhinah exists everywhere and pays attention to all, so too, spiritual guides (directors), are called to listen, attend to the spirit of their directees, and arrive with full presence.

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi advises, "Engage in this work knowing that the Shekhinah will be there with you, witnessing."[59] As the practice of spiritual direction invites God

[55] Sweeney, *Jewish Mysticism*, 271.
[56] Pirke Avot 3:3.
[57] Howard Avruhm Addison, "Reciprocal Grace: The Vocabulary of Jewish Spiritual Direction," in Addison and Breitman, *Jewish Spiritual Direction*, 55.
[58] Addison, "Reciprocal Grace," 55.
[59] Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, introduction to *Seeking and Soaring: Jewish Approaches to Spiritual Guidance and Development*, ed. Goldie Milgram and Shohama Wiener (Reclaiming Judaism Press, 2014), 28.

into the "third chair" of each session, so do we learn that the Shekhinah accompanies us in this sacred work. Some spiritual directors set an intention to bring Shekhinah's presence into each session. Carola de Vries Robles shares, "Thus, I often begin a session with '*hineni osha et atsmi*, *merkavah l'sh'khinah'* – Here I am making myself a chariot for the Shekhinah."[60] Rabbi Marcia Prager relays that, "The Holy Seer of Lublin taught that when we tell holy stories we bring the Divine Presence, the Shekhinah with all Her light, into the room with us."[61] By inviting directees to share their holy stories, we invite the light of God, the light of the Shekhinah, to dwell with us there.

Rabbi Goldie Milgram shares an experience of the Shekhinah in a spiritual direction session. About a directee, she writes, "Suddenly she becomes radiant and declares, 'It is Shekhinah (God's presence); I had not known She is within me!'" The Shekhinah may be with us in ways we are unable to articulate, and when we have moments of clarity of Her presence, it feels all the more powerful. Milgram's directee was able to access the direct presence of the Shekhinah in this session in such a way that the Shekhinah's light was reflected unto her, creating radiance. After this moment, Milgram offered space for the directee to offer her own prayer of gratitude. She says, "Shekhinah, thank you for revealing yourself to me…. Thank you for being inside loving me, just as I realize how much I need and love you."[62] In this way, the directee is able to name Shekhinah's presence and to appreciate the ways in which her unconditional love is directly longed for, creating pathways for access.

[60] Carola de Vries Robles, "How to Invite God In: *Hashpa'ah* after the Shoah (Holocaust)," in Milgram and Wiener, *Seeking and Soaring*, 115.
[61] Marcia Prager, "Holy Stories and Spiritual Direction," in Milgram and Wiener, *Seeking and Soaring*, 122.
[62] Goldie Milgram, "Helping Holiness Happen: Focusing and *Hashpa'ah*," in Milgram and Wiener, *Seeking and Soaring*, 102.

Psychotherapist Estelle Frankel shares another story about a client undergoing cancer treatment, writing, "During the [medical] treatments, she closed her eyes and simply imagined herself to be in the unconditionally loving presence of the Shechinah - the divine feminine. Instead of focusing on the destructive power of the radiation, she imagined it to be a manifestation of Shechinah's radiant light and love."[63] Spiritual direction is not only about inviting God into our sessions but extending the compassionate presence of God into daily life, particularly at times when we feel most stressed and alone. Frankel's example illustrates the power of accessing language, emotion, and spiritual attunement to bring Shekhinah's loving light into challenging moments outside of healing sessions themselves. Rabbi Zari M. Weiss inspires us to be an "abode of the Shechinah,"[64] based on the teachings of the renowned scholar Nachmanides. When we embody the Shekhinah, we offer compassion to the person with whom we dwell, an essential component of a trusting, sacred spiritual direction relationship.

Holding Wholeness and Brokenness

In Torah, we learn that there are two sets of the ten commandments. The first was broken in anger by Moses (Exodus 32), and the second was scribed at God's urging (Exodus 34). The Talmud states, "R. Joseph learnt… both the tablets and the fragments of the tablets were deposited in the ark."[65] This is an essential teaching to the practice of spiritual direction; wholeness and brokenness must be held together. In fact, it is nearly impossible to hold one without embracing the other. The scholar and poet Joy Ladin notes that the "Shekhinah [is] described in mystical Jewish tradition as the immanent, feminine aspect of God who dwells with

[63] Estelle Frankel, *Sacred Therapy: Jewish Spiritual Teachings on Emotional Healing and Inner Wholeness* (Shambhala, 2005), 180.
[64] Zari M. Weiss, "Spiritual Direction as a Contemplative Practice," in Addison and Breitman, *Jewish Spiritual Direction*, 66.
[65] Talmud Bava Batra 14b.

human beings and shares our lives, joys, and sorrows. What we feel, she feels, what we endure, she endures."[66] Our lives are multifaceted, and though sometimes painful, our spiritual work is to bring all of our Selves to God, and to spiritual direction, resting in the trust that the Shekhinah seeks to dwell with us there in love. As spiritual directors, we must model the Shekhinah's embrace and offer loving compassion to all the parts of our directees' lives.

Raphael writes that the "mystery of the holy is also that which approaches or draws near, even to what is defiled."[67] When we have experienced trauma and are in states of shame, sometimes we want to push God away, or hold false beliefs that God is too pure to accompany our shadows, our parts that we try so desperately to keep hidden from the world at large. Raphael's work provides a foundation to see the Shekhinah as a healing presence through not only day-to-day stressors, but also immense trauma. She writes, "God's presence, as that of the exiled Shekhinah, mends and cleans the world of Auschwitz and takes Israel out to meet its future."[68] As we remember that all of humanity is made in the image of God, including women, including the defiled, including when shame overshadows our Divine light, we are offered hope that in seeing God in one another's brokenness, we are able to restore the image of God.

The Shekhinah's accompanying us when we are suffering is a common theme in the Talmud,"[69] but how does this reveal itself in our daily lived experience? Biblically, Frankel reminds us, "God speaks to Moses out of a lowly thorn bush to convey symbolically that as Israel was suffering under the burdens of slavery and exile, the Shechinah, or divine presence, was suffering with them."[70] Raphael writes about the struggle to seek God in the pain of the

[66] Joy Ladin, *Shekhinah Speaks* (Selva Oscura Press, 2022), "A Note on the Poems."
[67] Raphael, *Female Face of God,* 7.
[68] Raphael, 13.
[69] Frankel, *Sacred Therapy,* 245.
[70] Frankel, *Sacred Therapy*, 244.

Holocaust, writing, "In Auschwitz-Birkenau when a woman lifted up her cast down face to the summons of her mother, daughter, sister, or friend it caught the reflected light of the Shekhinah on its upturned surface, reflecting the glory or *kavod* of God's face back into the world."[71] Raphael names these experiences as the "Shekhinah - the presence of God among us in our exile."[72] If the Shekhinah could accompany women in the most tragic of times, simply by noticing the Divine within one another's worn down faces, all the more may the Shekhinah accompany us in the practice of spiritual direction, by noticing the light of God in one another's faces. A beautiful story in the Zohar illustrates this point:

> Rabbi Yose, Rabbi Yehudah, and Rabbi Hiyya were traveling on the road, and Rabbi El'azar met them. As soon as they saw him, they all dismounted from their donkeys. Rabbi El'azar said, "Surely, I have seen the face of Shekhinah! For when one sees the righteous or virtuous of the generation and meets them, they are surely the face of Shekhinah." "Why are they called the face of Shekhinah? Because Shekhinah is hidden within them: She is in concealment and they are revealed, for those close to Shekhinah are called Her face. And who are they? Those with whom She adorns Herself to appear before the supernal King. Now, since you are here, surely Shekhinah is arrayed upon you, and you are Her face."[73]

Integration, Spiritual Growth, Compassion and Love

Fershtman writes, "As the mystical heart of Judaism is reclaimed, we move closer to bringing together the Divine lovers in the Song of Songs, weaving together the mystical and rational, creating psychic wholeness."[74] The mystical may be read as a placeholder for the feminine presence of God, while the rational is connected to the masculine presence of God. Both are necessary in our evolution and our healing. Fershtman notes that post traumatic growth leads us "to the awakened understanding that we participate in a larger consciousness."[75] From a

[71] Raphael, *Female Face of God*, 106.
[72] Raphael, 8.
[73] Zohar Vol.II 163b
[74] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 11.
[75] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 12.

Jungian perspective, Shekhinah has been embraced as the "feminine aspect of God, reunion with whom brings psycho-spiritual completion."[76]

A piece of our post-traumatic growth and psycho-spiritual integration is a relationship with Shekhinah as a source connecting us to a larger consciousness, taking us out of our small selves and into the expansive Holy Whole Selves we are destined to be. Rachel Nathan Jurovics asks, "What if the Shekhinah is not in the *galut* (exile) we imagine, but fully present to all who welcome Her, all who recognize that exile is an artifact of our fractured spirits, struggling against the mysterious illusion of duality?"[77] Rabbi Lavey Derby teaches that both *galut* and *galui*, revealed, share the same three Hebrew root letters, *gimel, lamed, hey*.[78] Thus, things may appear hidden or exiled while at the same time being present and revealed. When all is One, we may more fully experience the Shekhinah's presence, tending us in exile, while also recognizing that we are never fully exiled from the embrace of Shekhinah Herself.

Ellen Kaufman Dosick suggests that in spiritual direction, we "invite in the Shekhinah, and ask that Her profound compassion envelop all of you, so that the love for self, and others, and the One, grows and grows in the session."[79] With this invitation, we open ourselves and our directees to be held by the Shekhinah, expanding our sense of love and connection, deepening the felt experience of the Divine. The Shekhinah is seen as a symbol of unconditional love, exemplified through the Israeli poet Chaim Nachman Bialik's poem, "Shelter Me Under Your Wing," seeking the shelter of the Shekhinah in loving embrace.[80] His first and last stanza read,

> Take me under your wing,
> be my mother, my sister.

[76] Raphael, *Female Face of God*, 153.
[77] Raachel Nathan Jurovics, "Integrated Reb Zalman's Deep Ecumenism into the Practice of Spiritual Direction," in *Seeking and Soaring: Jewish Approaches to Spiritual Guidance and Development*, 362.
[78] Lavey Derby, conversation with the author, November 21, 2025.
[79] Ellen Kaufman Dosick, "Co-Creating the Sacred Container," in *Seeking and Soaring: Jewish Approaches to Spiritual Guidance and Development*, 239.
[80] Novick, *On the Wings*, 118.

Take my head to your breast,
my banished prayers to your nest.[81]

The Shekhinah here is seen as a protective feminine figure, as mother, as sister, and as breasted. The reference to "under your wing" may connect to the language used in the prayer *El Malei Rachamim*, asking our souls upon death to rest under the wings of the Shekhinah, the everlasting Divine presence.

Zohar scholar Hellner-Eshed writes, "Shekhinah's sanctuary and chariot consist of 'the way' and of people's hearts."[82] As a practice of expansive love and heartfelt connection, Shekhinah may be with us in spiritual direction, enlightening the way, allowing Divine energy to flow from one heart to another. The Psalmist exclaims, "Should an army besiege me, my heart would have no fear; should war beset me, still would I be confident."[83] Rabbi Ruth Sohn[84] reminded me that the Hebrew word for "in this" is "the feminine *zot* (a kabbalistic name for Shekhinah)."[85] As a reference to Shekhinah, we are reminded that when we trust in this, the Shekhinah Herself, we are gathered in the protective embrace of a loving God. Frankel reminds us that another name for God, *Ehyeh*, which means "I will be," revealed at the burning bush, "implies, according to one midrash, a promise that the Shechinah, or divine presence, will be with Israel throughout their ordeals of the current and all future exiles."[86] May the Shekhinah be with us in all exiles, past and current, large and small, and may She be with us in each spiritual direction session, helping us to remember that She is with us always.

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[81] Chaim Nachman Bialik, "Take Me Under Your Wing," Poetry International, Accessed January 10, 2025, previously published as *Chaim Nachman Bialik: Selected Poems*, translated by Ruth Nevo (Dvir & *The Jerusalem Post*, 1981), https://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poems/poem/103-3353_TAKE-ME-UNDER-YOUR-WING.
[82] Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows*, 116.
[83] Psalms 27:3 (JPS TANKAH).
[84] Ruth Sohn, email message to author, August 27, 2025.
[85] Elliot K. Ginsburg, "Leaping and Waiting: Reflections on a Slonimer Text; A *Shpatzir* in Four Movements," in Addison and Breitman, *Jewish Spiritual Direction*, 285.
[86] Frankel, *Sacred Therapy*, 244.

Chapter Three

Spiritual Direction and the Compassion Practice

In this chapter, I will explore and validate the need for bringing the compassion practice to spiritual direction, particularly as it relates to the concept of a compassionate, loving God through the lens of Shekhinah.

A Compassionate Heart

"Soft not hard
Open not closed
Warm not cold
Broken open not calloused
Heart of flesh v. heart of stone
My heart goes out to you; breaks for you; bleeds for you."[87]

Frank Rogers writes, "Spiritual direction is a compassion-based ministry. We give ourselves to it in the first place out of compassion—out of our deep care for the sacred souls that come to us within the sweeps and swirls of their lives. Spiritual direction provides a space where all is welcome, where all is held in the grace of contemplative curiosity and care."[88] If we hold spiritual direction as compassion in practice, we open our broken hearts to one another, allowing pathways for God's energy to more easily flow.

Rogers reminds us that to practice compassion-based spiritual direction, we must hold our directees with love, "in ways that intend to either ease their suffering or promote their flourishing."[89] We channel the energy of a compassion based Divine figure, creating a safe container for the truest soul of our directee to emerge. Rogers writes, "Our Self presence is the holy meeting place we invite our directees to enter. It is the tabernacle where the Sacred

[87] Rogers, *Supervision Training*, 9.
[88] Frank Rogers Jr., "Compassion-Based Spiritual Direction: Internal Family Systems as a Resource for Spiritual Companions," *Presence: An International Journal of Spiritual Direction* 26, no. 4 (2020): 60.
[89] Rogers, *Supervision Training*, 9.

resides."[90] The language of the tabernacle reminds us of the language of the Shekhinah, as the dwelling place for the Holy. As She is in exile from the Temple, She now finds her way into our hearts; our Self essence becomes the most essential dwelling place for the Shekhinah, and we invite our directees to meet us there.

Shekhinah As Compassionate Presence

Hellner-Eshed teaches that according to the Zohar, when the masculine presence of God withdrew from the world, Shekhinah remained as the "sole worldly presence of holiness, compassion, and providence for the Jewish people."[91] We hold this alongside Rogers' teaching that "humanity is created in the image of the divine; as such we are created in the image of compassion. Our compassionate, connected Self is our 'truest' Self, our essence, or our core. This core Self dwells within each of us as an enduring capacity for Compassionate connection. This core Self is where our greatest spiritual resources dwell to live with resilience, wisdom, dignity, and compassion."[92] Torah teaches we are made *b'tzelem Elohim*, in the image of God.[93] This very image is a source of compassion, an embodied reminder that just as the Shekhinah is the holy, compassionate presence we seek, so too She is found in our very image, and in the image of those we companion.

In thinking about the ways that the Divine dwells within, closest to our Self, we can access that energy in our healing journeys, with wise companions along the way. Rabbi Leah Novick describes Shekhinah's characteristics as being similar to attributes of ancient goddesses, specifically naming "love, charity, compassion, fairness, healing, justice, power, sharing, and

[90] Rogers, "Compassion-Based Spiritual Direction," 57.
[91] Hellner-Eshed, *A River Flows*, 116.
[92] Rogers, *Supervision Training*, 11.
[93] Genesis 1:27 (JPS TANKAH).

connectedness."[94] The Shekhinah is not just a Divine presence, She is one that can hold us with compassion, *rachamim*, from *rechem*, meaning womb in Hebrew. She envelops us with care. She can help us remember the possibility of rebirth and new beginnings. The *El Malei Rachamim* prayer, also explored by Novick, says "God filled with compassion… grant perfect rest beneath the wings of Shekhinah." In this way, we acknowledge that the Shekhinah embodies the compassionate presence of God, and that we can find complete rest in her overarching presence, or "beneath her wings."

In the Zohar, the well is another symbol of the Shekhinah, a "place where lovingkindness has overflowed."[95] Lovingkindness as a compassionate presence in spiritual direction invites the Shekhinah in. With the image of the well, we envision abundant waters, nourishing us in our droughts, quenching our thirst, and being a source that sustains us in life. Spiritual direction may also be a well, a place where we find nourishment in our spiritual journey, where lovingkindness flows from the genuine compassionate energy of our hearts.

Shekhinah Accompanying in Our Shattering

Rogers writes a beautiful and powerful memoir detailing his recovery from childhood abuse to wholeness and healing through the loving, compassionate presence of God. Through this process, Rogers is able to integrate the disparate parts of himself, bringing them together in a healthy, restorative way. I am in awe of Rogers' experience of the Shekhinah as the loving, compassionate presence of God who accompanied him through brokenness and toward sacred completeness, *shleimut*, a sense of being whole, even in brokenness. Rogers writes, "I came to call the figure Shekinah, the feminine presence of God within the Jewish tradition whose power is compassion, and whose glory sits undulled with the lost, the soiled, and the desolate ones still

[94] Novick, *On the Wings*, 7.
[95] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 160.

weeping in our world."[96] Since the exile from the Temple in Jerusalem 2000 years ago, the Shekhinah has dwelled with people in their pain and provided a source of steady accompaniment and tender presence. Rogers further writes, "The Shekhinah presence, tending the wounded ones within me, was keeping my spirit alive."[97] If we return to the image of the well, the Shekinah not only tends to the pain, but its waters are the source that sustains life.

In the story of the Exodus, the people cry out to God and awaken God's compassion.[98] When we call out to God, we open the possibility of awakening God's compassion, of accessing the immanent Divine source of compassion, the Shekhinah. Spiritual direction may be a place where we cry out to God, where we name our desire to feel closer to God, where we invite the immanence of God to dwell. Fershtman writes, "The holding presence of the Shekhinah, or Divine Mother, is awakened, healing us in those places where the transmission of maternal love has been constrained by trauma."[99]

In the absence of pure love in our lives, spiritual direction is a place where we can awaken the Shekhinah, and where spiritual directors can hold their directees with unconditional loving regard, engaging in the sacred practice of participating in the healing of souls. Fershtman continues, "In the darkest and loneliest experiences, we may find we are not alone."[100] We are physically not alone when we dwell in spiritual direction, and spiritually, spiritual directors may hold space in ways that help channel divine accompaniment there. In holding compassionate space, we participate in the healing that Fershtman encourages, one where we all "must find [our] connection to Shekhinah, the mothering presence that will allow the tears of [our] broken

[96] Frank Rogers Jr., *Cradled in the Arms of Compassion: A Spiritual Journey from Trauma to Recovery*, (Lake Drive Books, 2023), 149.
[97] Rogers, *Cradled in the Arms of Compassion*, 156.
[98] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 96.
[99] Fershtman, 115.
[100] Fershtman, 117.

hearts to flow."[101] The welling up of tears invites the well of the Shekhinah; through opening our hearts and inviting brokenheartedness, we create space for new life to emerge.

Spiritual Directors as Channels of Compassion

The wise spiritual leader Margaret Guenther reminds us of the most important of the commandments,[102] "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might"[103] and "Love your fellow as yourself."[104] All else flows from there. As it pertains to the practice of spiritual direction, Carola de Vries Robles writes, "Unconditional love and discriminative awareness become available as the center from which to do and be…. One truly becomes a vehicle for Presence — *merkavah la'Shekhinah*."[105] In becoming a chariot for the Shekhinah, we express our love for our neighbor, our directee, and we channel our heart, our soul, and our mind toward inviting the immanence of the Divine, the Shekhinah, to meet us there.

Guenther continues, "The director who is convinced of God's love and mercy, even when the directee is not, is able to accept any disclosure with equanimity. Through her loving acceptance she is able to model and reflect the love of God so yearned for by the directee."[106] This statement is at the heart of the practice of compassion-based spiritual direction. We hold our directees with compassion, unconditional loving regard, and by our very presence, can be a mirror of God's loving embrace. If, as Raphael reminds us, God's presence is there even when we cannot access it, we trust in the availability of the Shekhinah, yearning for her arms to envelop us, even when we feel most far away. If our spiritual director can help us hold the faith

[101] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 116.
[102] Margaret Guenther, *Holy listening: the art of spiritual direction* (Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 26.
[103] Deuteronomy 6:5 (JPS TANAKH).
[104] Leviticus 19:18 (JPS TANAKH).
[105] Carola de Vries Robles, *How to Invite God In*, 114.
[106] Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 21.

that God is there, that God loves us in our very brokenness, we come one step closer toward healing that which feels painfully alone.

Rebbe Nachman teaches that God is everywhere, even when God is hidden. He writes, with a reference to the Talmud, "If someone asks you, 'Where is your God?, tell him, 'In the great city of Rome, (Yerushalmi Taanit 1). For even in places filled with idols and cults, God is present, albeit hidden." The Rebbe continues, "If you sink to such places, God forbid, as soon as you begin to search *Ayeh*? – "Where is the complete place of His glory" – you draw life for yourself from the life-force of holiness."[107] The seeking of God, the longing for God, draws us closer to God, and returns us to life. God's glory, *mekom kevodo*, may be interpreted as Shekhinah, as the great philosopher Maimonides spoke of the Shekinah as a metaphor for Divine glory.[108] As spiritual directors, we accompany directees as they may begin to ask the question, "*ayeh*?" where are you, God?, and in so asking, they again invite the Shekhinah to draw near. Guenter reminds us, "The importance of shared emotion, of empathy and compassion cannot be underestimated."[109] The practice of spiritual direction is holy work, and without creating a safe container of compassion in which to do the work, we run the risk of harming the very people we aim to heal.

The archetypal compassionate mother is essential to the well-being of souls. Fershtman explains, "Without the support of his mother, [the biblical Joseph] loses the connection to the ground of being, He experiences a split, where his true self goes into hiding."[110] Can we look at mother beyond Joseph's literal mother, but as the Mother, the Shekhinah? When we lose our

[107] Likutey Moharan II, 12.
[108] David Silverberg, "The 'Glory of the Lord' and the Shekhina," Maimonides Heritage Center, accessed November 21, 2025, https://www.mhcny.org/parasha/1023.pdf.
[109] Guenther, *Holy Listening*, 38.
[110] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 159.

way, our connection, we lose our sense of groundedness, our connection to the Earth, which is yet another symbol of Shekhinah. Fershtman writes "[Joseph] is profoundly alone."[111] The antidote to our aloneness is compassionate connection, and the practice of spiritual direction is fertile ground for bringing compassionate connection to such accessible sacred space.

Fershtman continues, "The essence of trauma is not that some injury occurred, but that there were no loving arms to hold us and to help us integrate and make meaning of the event."[112] The Shekhinah can be those loving arms to help hold us and remind us that we are safe. The possibility of healing and integration is always available to us, as is the possibility of *teshuvah*, returning to our most authentic Self, but we need compassion to hold us, compassion for ourselves, compassion for one another, and compassion from God.

On Choosing Life - Toward Redemption

We need to remember our inherent beauty when we find ourselves in states of distress, as the Shekhinah dwells within us. Fershtman relays a midrash[113] that directly speaks to the reclaiming of beauty during a time of crisis, ultimately inspiring procreation, and imagining a future that seemed impossible. The Baal Shem Tov "taught that to ascend to the highest levels, we must first descend, go to the depths of ourselves, to attend to that which needs healing, to prepare ourselves to become."[114] Suffering, while being held by a compassionate source, leads to our becoming.

Entering the dark shadows of our souls is no longer a frightening isolated endeavor, but a necessary step toward ascending to the most sacred version of our Self. The journey of the dark night of the soul is not as scary when we know we do not journey alone. Regarding the practice

[111] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 160.
[112] Fershtman, 90.
[113] Fershtman, 87.
[114] Fershtman, 114.

of spiritual direction, Rogers writes, we must "trust that the Sacred is hidden within [the directee's experience], healing, restoring, and leading the directee into fullness of life."[115] In doing so, "we trust that the Sacred is present within every human experience, holding every slice of life with compassion and integrating it all into a unity of restorative love."[116] This restorative love helps us meet our directees wherever they may dwell, and to hold each of their experiences with compassion.

We learn in the book of Psalms that God is close to the broken hearted, and the Baal Shem Tov teaches that it is "only when the heart is broken that God's words can enter us." However, in seeking a sense of safety from living with such open, broken hearts, Fershtman suggests that, "we cling to the logical, masculine approach of logos and cut off feminine eros."[117] She hopes that, "the holding presence of the Shekhinah enables us to surrender our defenses and enter the unknown, to risk trusting again, even after our trust has been profoundly betrayed."[118] Broken hearts leave us in a state of vulnerability, and we cannot always walk through the world with completely broken hearts; sometimes we need the masculine approach to help us survive in hostile environments.

Yet this protective approach alone does not open our souls to the holy work we are called to do in this lifetime, leaving us to question, how do we walk with broken hearts and feel safe in doing so? One answer, I believe, is to bring our broken hearts to the safe container of spiritual direction, to meet the compassionate face of the director there, and to channel the compassionate face of God, that of the Shekhinah. As our broken hearts create open pathways for the Divine, and as we are held, our souls begin to feel safer to bring their light out into the larger world, one

[115] Rogers, "Compassion-Based Spiritual Direction," 57.
[116] Rogers, "Compassion-Based Spiritual Direction," 57.
[117] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 181.
[118] Fershtman, 197.

moment at a time. Fershtman writes, "The suffering involved… opens us to states of profound insight and awakens the possibility of transformation and redemption."[119] In this way, our suffering may be the beginning of being held by Shekhinah, and of being healed.

The book of Deuteronomy states, "I have put before you life and death, blessing and curse. Choose life – if you and your offspring would live."[120] How do we choose life over and over and over again? Perhaps it is through a deep knowing that the Shekhinah is with us, sustaining us, and dwelling wherever we may dwell. Rogers poignantly asks, "If the life's work of the feminine divine is Tikkun Olam—repairing the world through restorative acts of kindness and compassion while gathering the shards of God's shattered oneness—how do we partner with that presence in repairing the shattered oneness of a survivor's soul?"[121] This is the question indeed. Similarly, Rogers writes in a former publication, "Such restoration is possible. The compassionate Self within our directees that can tend to their parts with such pitch perfect care, and the compassionate Self within us as directors that accompany them in their soul work, both are infused with the compassion that sustains the entire universe."[122] May the compassionate presence sustain us, through brokenness and through repair, in a cycle of seeking redemption, and knowing that it is continually available to us, if only we cry out from the depths of despair and yearn for the life-giving presence of Shekhinah.

[119] Fershtman*, The Mystical Exodus*, 51.
[120] Deuteronomy 30:19 (JPS TANAKH).
[121] Rogers, *Cradled in the Arms of Compassion*, 249.
[122] Rogers, "Compassion-Based Spiritual Direction," 60.

Chapter Four

Interview Methodology and Emerging Patterns

This chapter will include a description of the interview methodology used for the study, followed by the results. I will note patterns discovered in the interviews and ways in which including concepts of Shekhinah in spiritual direction training programs may deepen the compassion practice between director and directee.

The Study Participants

To begin recruiting participants, I sent an email to the Jewish Spiritual Directors listserv, seeking people who would be willing to participate in either a four-week small group or an individual interview to "contribute to a better understanding of how the concept of the Shekhinah is helpful for the practice of spiritual direction and where there may be a need to more explicitly teach about the Shekhinah and compassion-based spiritual care in Jewish and interfaith spiritual direction training programs."[123] I was gratefully overwhelmed by the immediacy of response, with over a dozen emails in reply within 24 hours of the invitation, either to offer excitement for the work or to schedule an interview. Unfortunately, while a few people expressed interest in a group if one came to be, the vast majority preferred to be interviewed individually, both for scheduling logistics and for depth of content able to be shared in a private space versus a shared space. Consequently, the research for the purpose of this project solely consists of ten individual interviews, without a group component.

The interviewees are all trained spiritual directors. The youngest participant is 45 years old and the oldest is 90, with the majority in their 60s and 70s. The study consisted of interviews with two cis-gendered men and 8 cis-gendered women, with at least three participants identifying

[123] Ashley B. Plotnick, email message to Jewish Spiritual Directors listserv, July 12, 2025.

as LGBTQ+. One participant identifies as a practicing Catholic, and nine people identify as Jewish. One had previously converted to Judaism. Four of the study participants had been leaders in some capacity within spiritual direction programs. The interviewees learned the art of spiritual direction in a variety of training programs including a Jesuit program, a program led by the Reform Jewish movement, a non-denominational Jewish training program, a Jewish renewal program, a program of the archdiocese, and multiple non-denominational Christian programs. One person trained in the 1980s as the only Jewish person in her program, and another was the first Jewish person in a Catholic program. Two participants completed training less than one year ago. The remaining participants became spiritual directors between 2003 and 2018.

Notably, the Shekhinah was absent or loosely referenced in the majority of the training programs, including the Jewish programs. One former program director decided to search all of her electronic spiritual direction training files for the word *Shekhinah* to see what she may find. Upon searching she exclaimed, "nothing!" While the Shekhinah was strikingly absent from curricular training materials, the interviewees had much to say about their own understanding of and experience with Her in their personal lives and in their practice of spiritual direction.

To facilitate the conversations, I shared numerous traditional Jewish texts on the Shekhinah[124] and incorporated the following questions into the interviews:

1) What inspired you to want to be interviewed for this project?
2) Were the texts we just explored your first introduction to Shekhinah?
3) If not, where did you first learn about Her? What were your held beliefs or understanding about Her?
4) What do you think of when you hear the word, Shekhinah?

[124] See Appendix A.

5) Was there any mention of Shekhinah in your spiritual direction training program?
6) Where have you experienced the compassionate presence of God in your life? Can you describe the experience? How did it feel?
7) Do you experience the masculine and feminine presence of God in different ways?
8) How does the presence of Shekhinah inform your work with directees?
9) How might you carry what you learned today into your work with directees or into your own spiritual practice?
10) What are your big dreams for how what we discussed today may be carried into spiritual direction training programs in the future?

Depending on the length of time in response to each question and each participant's curiosities, some people went more in depth with a single text on the Shekhinah while others provided brief reflections on multiple texts. All of the texts shared can be found in Appendix A at the conclusion of this paper.

Clear patterns emerged from the research, including the experience of the Shekhinah as immanence, Shekhinah as an enveloping Mother while also being beyond gender, Shekhinah as a compassionate presence, one capable of accompanying us in our personal exiles, personal spiritual experiences with the Shekhinah, and finally the highlighted importance of finding ways to better incorporate Shekhinah into spiritual direction training programs.

Shekhinah as Immanence

While historical knowledge differed among the participants, eight had some way of explicitly expressing the Shekhinah as Divine immanence, particularly relating to the text, "There is no place empty of Shekhina."[125] One participant noted this idea is informed by her

[125] See Appendix A.

own Hasidic theology, that there is no place where God is not. This person explained "Shekhinah is with me all of the time, surrounding me with *shalom*, peace, and with *shalem*, wholeness." She also described experiencing Shekhinah as "energy in my whole body, infusing my whole body." In this way, Shekhinah is immanent, both in the energy around her and the energy within her.

Another participant noted, "God is everywhere, There's no place devoid of God. So, Shekhinah is the most accessible aspect, or the dwelling, and also the indwelling. The word actually means dwelling. The immanent aspect of God is absolutely everywhere. There's nothing devoid of the divine. I believe that." Another mused, "I very much understand that presence, and I feel that presence. I was really curious; how can I name that more? What would that feel like? I named it as the Shekhinah. That was the inspiration for this [spiritual direction] work. That presence is the inspiration, and we must feel that in order to really embody the work." Yet another said, "It is all very immanent; Shekhinah is one of the names of God that people will use."

As the participants sought to describe their experience of the immanent God, they also noted that language could be both a barrier and an opening to more possibilities of naming the Sacred. One person described an "experience of grace, experience of Shekhinah." She continued, that "is what I call it - total mystery cannot be explained." Another person said, "I think if God desires to be known by us, God is going to give us lots of ways in, lots of images, lots of language, lots of paths." The Shekhinah is the name for one such path in, one way of calling the immanent, indwelling presence of the Divine.

In the practice of spiritual direction, we may be curious about the ways in which the Shekhinah dwells within us, as directees and directors. If we hold the theology that we are

created in the image of God, there is a mutual process to spiritual direction; God is within each person and in our interactions. One participant wondered how we might share a concept of an immanent God with a directee who does not know of that God; perhaps an exploration of the Shekhinah is one way in. Another noted that in "spiritual direction I think of phrases or concepts like inviting God in." Those types of small invitations have the potential to go long ways, especially when a directee is struggling and unsure how to invite God into the struggle.

One participant explained how the immanence and indwelling of the Shekhinah as Divine energy, such as within the *Mishkan*, is essential to our understanding of spiritual direction:

> The difference between when we sense and don't sense Divine presence can be simply our openness to it, our being tuned in. There are certain things we can do to make it more conducive for other people to feel it for ourselves and for others. So, I think that is the idea of any spiritual practices — to cultivate our capacity to sense Divine presence. When we're with another person, a spiritual director who is focused on that, it helps people access it themselves. I see that as the most important thing we do to support the other person's access to a sense of a connection to the Divine. When we sit together with another individually, or in a group, in some sense, we're creating and opening to sacred space, where you could say that the structure of the practice we're building for ourselves is a *Mishkan* so that the divine can dwell among us and within each of us.

"There is no place empty of the Shekhinah" indeed, especially when we open our hearts and tune them to Her existence.[126]

Shekhinah as Beyond Gender

For some, the gender of the immanent God is a meaningful connection, while for others, the idea of a gendered God is limiting. It is helpful to remember that prior to the 12th century, the Shekhinah existed as the non-gendered immanence of God, even though the word was always grammatically feminine. Only with the rise of Jewish mysticism and the creation of Kabbalah did the Shekhinah become known as the feminine presence of God. I believe both are

[126] See Appendix A.

true; the Shekhinah is beyond gender, *and* She is the compassionate, energetically feminine, aspect of the Divine.

The complexity of the Shekhinah's gender came up in seven of the interviews. One participant described the Shekhinah as "a presence that's immanent, definitely feminine." Another shared that she was "always taught about being in the womb, that we exist in God's womb and that the feminine energy of God, that which we identify with, the best mother energy, or the best girlfriend energy, is the energy that we have the most immediate access to, because that's the enlivening force in this realm." The enlivening energy is just that - Shekhinah energy which nourishes us, sustains us, and holds us with care.

One person explained that she is now "opening up to a more nonbinary understanding of God." Another said, "God is not male or female. It's both, God is not a pronoun." While holding this to be true, this person described relating to the Shekhinah as the "softer side of the Divine, as energy and wind, and as a flow that can surround and support." He continued, "Compassion can be both masculine and feminine." While recognizing that the softer side may be feminine in nature, he did not want to be limited by gender.

Another participant noted, "We don't get a lot by limiting anything about God, and gender is one of the things that limits God." Yet another person said, "This is a dimension of God, which is an energy and the energy of the female, but is so much more than gender. It's a way of perceiving the work. It's a way of enacting the work that I know is female, but I'm not gendering it." Finally, we are reminded from an interviewee, "The male and female aspects of God, it's a very heteronormative archetype. What I get from the mystics is the interchangeability, the fluidity between the two; it's both, it's not either." It is important to note the ways in which this theme came up repeatedly in the interviews without any text directly

about gender. The interview question about how one experiences the masculine and feminine presence of God in different ways may have encouraged this topic,[127] but oftentimes the interviewees brought up the ideas early on in the conversation on their own. There was a perceived longing to connect to the immanence of God without being confined by the cultural duality of human gender.

> One participant shared a beautiful teaching from her mystic grandmother, stating,
>
> The common word for God was *Elohim*, which, my grandma pointed out, meant it included everything, because it's a plural name. So, it was inclusive of it all. Back then, we're going back 65 years or so, a little more, she started training when I was three, so 67 years ago. It was just commonly accepted that the masculine plural ending was inclusive of masculine and feminine. When she was crying out for God's compassion, or for someone to be saved in healing, prayer, *rahmana*, that was the aspect of God that we reached out to. But God is the whole thing. It was also not separate from us.

While the gender of the Shekhinah as God is complex, the ways in which She is known as a compassionate, maternal force in the world is deeply meaningful and often serves as an access point to her tender care.

Shekhinah As Enveloping Mother

The Zohar teaches, "She is sometimes called daughter and sometimes sister and sometimes mother. She is all and everything is in Her."[128] The sense of the Shekhinah's maternal love was expressed in over half of the interviews. One man noted that while he struggles with gendering the Shekhinah, he does find the feminine presence comforting and has imagined "resting in the bosom of God" and has experienced Shekhinah as an "enveloping mother," which came as a surprise even to himself. Another shared, "I sometimes pray with my hands on my womb," embodying the way in which Shekhinah is connected to her sense of

[127] See Appendix B.
[128] Zohar 2:100b.

maternal life and creating life anew. One more interviewee explained that she learned from her mystic grandmother, "The essence that dwells within us is the Mother energy." Her grandmother did not name it as Shekhinah at the time, but she does now in order to have language that is "in alignment with other people."

As the Shekhinah embodies the Divine Mother, one participant connected Her presence to birth. I shared Pesikta D'Rav Kahana 1.1 with her, which concludes, "to what can the Tent of Meeting be compared? To a cave along the seashore, when the waves come into the cave, but the ocean is not depleted. In this way the Tent of Meeting was filled with the radiance of Shekhina." This person loved the imagery of the waves entering the cave, without depleting the ocean. She said, "Water is the source of life. It's all fertility…the connections to childbirth and giving life, and I mean that metaphorically, too." The well is another life-giving source connected to Shekhinah, as water replenishes, nourishes, and renews.

Many participants had ways to describe experiences of the Shekhinah enveloping them. One woman said she "felt held in the lap of the Shekhinah" during a visualization. She also experienced her Self essence while lying on the earth, another metaphor for Shekhinah, where she heard an inner voice say, "let go of your burdens, I will be with you, you are not alone." Another person shared she had an experience of "God holding you now, in your pain and in your tears" while in spiritual direction training, and that upon reflection, she believes that was the Shekhinah energy of God holding her.

A few participants noted experiences where they have used a tallit in the context of spiritual direction or been offered a tallit by their own spiritual director, to embody the sense of being held by the Shekhinah. The idea of being under the wings of the Shekhinah, found in the *El Malei Rahamim* prayer, was also a theme threaded into some of the interviews. The *El Malei*

Rahamim is a prayer often recited at Jewish funerals and means "God full of compassion." The enveloping Shekhinah, who holds us tenderly beneath Her wings, is the compassionate source of Divine love in our lives.

Shekhinah as Compassionate Presence

The Shekhinah as a compassionate presence was brought up in eight of the interviews. One participant noted that while he did not learn about compassion in spiritual direction training, he later learned about compassion practices through Internal Family Systems training and finds the concept of God as compassion to be useful and connected to his own theology of experiencing God as love. Another interviewee described how her spiritual direction training program was seeking language to transmit the idea of a compassionate, witnessing Divine presence, but was not explicit in naming the Shekhinah as the compassionate face of God. She said that her own theology is informed by Hasidic theology, where God has the potential to be comforting at all times, even in distress. Shekhinah was noted to be an "access point" to experiencing God's compassion by another participant. And yet another said, "That enlivening force as a loving expression, a loving, supportive, compassionate expression, that's the goddess." This person has used goddess language interchangeably with the energy of Shekhinah.

Regarding Shekhinah energy, one participant stated, "It's the compassionate presence, but it also awakens you to something that you wouldn't be able to necessarily access if you weren't in this container of spiritual direction." Someone else spoke of the importance of a hospitable atmosphere to invite the compassionate presence of God in, noting that he found meaning in his own spiritual director using dim lighting and offering tea. Another said, "My intention always is to create that container, that space in which the people who I'm working with can feel held in compassion and love and have their own divinity mirrored to them. So, I'm always calling on

that energy. I really feel that the presence that I'm invoking and inviting through is that Shekhinah energy." While as spiritual directors we create compassionate space for our directees, we must do so with an awareness that people experience God in myriad ways and may come to spiritual direction with trauma around the God of their childhood or earlier adult lives.

One interviewee spoke of using the concept of a compassionate God with directees who have believed that God is punitive and judgmental. While this person does not always explicitly name the Shekhinah in inviting in a compassionate God, he has used the idea with directees who are particularly harsh with themselves, offering something that may soften the harshness, such as, "I wonder if we invited Shekhinah into this space, how would you like to visualize that?" He reported that some people come up with light or color to surround them, helping to access the more compassionate face of God. Another explained the experience of meeting with a particularly goal-driven, high achieving directee who was disappointed about her prayer life after a complex medical event, "I didn't use Shekhinah with her, but I definitely used the words compassion and self-compassion, and it was beautiful because she was sharing with me her own turn towards softening with herself. I named for her that beautiful compassion, that kindness." Spiritual directors who are aware of the Shekhinah as a compassionate presence of God may be better able to deepen their offering of that compassionate presence to their spiritual directees.

Another person explained, "In spiritual direction, we meet with people who are evolved at different stages, or whose personal life, experience, and whatever wounding and trauma makes that concept and these conversations actually very powerful because it helps to meet them where they're at and at the same time bring them that loving, compassionate energy and how to integrate that into the whole, knowing they are whole." A different spiritual director interviewee shared that in her own journey from grief and distance from God, she now "experiences God as

love, allowing her Self to be held, under the canopy of peace, every night." The canopy of peace is language from the *Hashkiveinu* prayer and is closely connected to the Shekhinah, as the Divine presence that shelters us in peace. For some, the energy of the Shekhinah is embodied and real, while for others She is seen as a helpful metaphor, but not necessarily real in one's own lived experience.

One person said, "when you have a Jewish population who are yearning for some expression of a God that they can relate to, then you need that image [of Shekhinah as a compassionate God] because if the only image that they have is one that's been created by Michelangelo as a God of judgment and wrath, it is an important metaphoric reference. When people have nothing except the God that they don't believe in, the God that they were brought up with that was punishing, and angry and brought destruction… the bitterness, the anger, the retribution, it's a nightmare. So, to have another voice, a voice of compassion, accompaniment or companionship, as a metaphor for spiritual direction, I think that that is helpful." This image, whether as a metaphor or the direct experience of God, is one we need when in exile, physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

Shekhinah as One who Accompanies us in Exile

Four people were explicitly moved in their interviews by the idea of the Shekhinah accompanying us in our exile.[129] One person explained how meaningful it is to "think of the Shekhinah, that presence that guided the people through the desert to the Promised Land, forty years of wandering the desert, from slavery to freedom, as the presence that accompanies us and journeys with us on the path." If the Shekhinah could accompany the people through the long journey from slavery to freedom, She may be the One who accompanies us in our own struggles.

[129] See Appendix A.

Another person noted, “The discussion of exile or distance is something that's critical to a lot of people who feel in some way on the fringe, or exiled or distant from, or not able to access.” If we are able to bring the idea of exile to spiritual direction, we help our directees feel safe exploring their own exiles, how they feel alone, or disconnected, or different, which can be a beautiful access point in allowing the disconcerted parts of themselves to quietly emerge and be held.

One interviewee said, “there are beautiful things about Shekhinah suffering with us, being with us in our suffering.” This person said that she feels it would be important for spiritual directors in training to learn about the concept of the Shekhinah being with us in our suffering, and that she finds it to be “an enormous comfort.” She continued, “we are focused on the Shekhinah as the most accessible aspect of the Divine, but the [importance] is how God cares about us and never abandons us. That is really important, the different ways people experience exile, and the idea of Shekhinah accompanying us in exile, that God is there with us; the Shekhinah is the profound immanence of the Divine God. God is here. God is really here. That's Shekhinah being present. God is really, really here.” If spiritual direction is a practice where God is “really, really here,” how beautiful to invite in the idea of an immanent God with us in all of our exiles.

Shekhinah in Personal Spiritual Experience

Seven of the interviewees mentioned having experience with the Shekhinah in their own personal spiritual lives. Two people talked about familiarity with the Angel Blessing,[130] which references the Shekhinah above our heads and is traditionally recited before bedtime. Another

[130] Bruce Feldstein, “Angel Blessing,” The Jewish Chaplaincy at Stanford University Medical Center, Accessed November 22nd, 2025, https://stanfordhealthcare.org/content/dam/SHC/patientsandvisitors/spiritual-care/docs/angelblessing.pdf.

said, “At the end of the day, I thank Shekhinah for the blessings seen and unseen during the day.” Yet another shared, “I sing praises to Her every morning when I take an early morning walk, as the sun is just coming up and the birds are starting to make sounds. I'm always singing my gratitude and my praise, and it's always in feminine form, my prayer, my words. I always offer the blessing in feminine form because I really feel like the aspect, the presence that I'm invoking and inviting through, is that Shekhinah energy.” There are many different ways to invoke the energy of the Shekhinah, both in the mundane acts of daily living, and in the holy presence of accompanying others in spiritual direction.

One person explained how Shekhinah was the presence that she called to at times of immense grief in her life. Another said that she led a visualization for a terminally ill friend asking for “golden light, angels, and the Shekhinah,” and in return she felt a sense of being “connected by waves and streams of light.” Yet another interviewee shared having a dream “where [she] was very much alone, sitting in the words, and a light filled woman, like a ballerina, with a lacy flowing dress, came and sat down beside me. There was not any conversation, but there was this sense of not being alone anymore; it felt as real as life; it felt like a real experience of the presence [Shekhinah].” Another person was excited to share a sacred experience with a fellow spiritual leader who “said that [she] was a sign from God.” She continued “It blew my mind so completely. I have no memory of the next three days. My entire body just trembled, and I didn't touch the ground for three more days. The only way I could explain it was that it was the Shekhinah, putting me in exactly the right place, absolutely, unexpectedly, for me.”

As the participants shared experiences of the Shekhinah in their spiritual lives, I felt a sense of being a holy witness to their stories. The majority of these participants came into the

interview knowing they had had an experience with Shekhinah and named Her as such. A few of the participants had familiarity with the concept of the Shekhinah but would not have named their immanent experiences with the Divine as an encounter with Shekhinah until the interview questions and texts elicited such a response. This data was biased by nature of the participants self-selecting to speak about the Shekhinah in the context of this research, but even so, it was clear that providing language and space around the idea of the Shekhinah as a compassionate, immanent, Divine presence, people were better able to access that aspect of God in their lived experiences and yearning for ongoing connection. Perhaps if spiritual directors had more education around the Shekhinah and could invite Her into the sacred space of spiritual direction sessions, they would be better equipped to accompany in ways that welcome stories of the Shekhinah's abounding presence in people's lives.

Shekhinah in Future Spiritual Direction Training Programs

More than half of the participants expressed excitement about the possibility of bringing Shekhinah into spiritual direction training programs, while highlighting the ways in which teaching about Her would enlighten the practice of spiritual direction. Someone exclaimed "It is so refreshing to have this discussion!" Another reflected,

> "Compassion has been a high value for me my whole life…. what is actual compassion, what is true, Divine indwelling compassion… if you're teaching people to listen well and to listen attentively, and without an agenda, and with a sense of reverence for the other person, that is the Shekinah, even if you're not framing it that way, or you're not using that word. That is creating and guiding people in embodying this sense of divine compassion."

While the language of naming Shekhinah is not necessary to embody Her felt experience, language is also essential for some people. One interviewee said,

> "The problem is language, the limitation of language, to talk about God. So even by saying God, it's problematic because it feels so small compared to the sense of the enormity of the power of the energy of the way the loving energy of the immanent

> presence of God shows up in different ways. I think that people need to talk about God. People need to talk about their problems with God. Judaism was filled with anger and judgement for me growing up. Is there another language that one can use to describe the loving, compassionate God? It is important for people to have a conversation about what it was like as children learning about God. What other language, image, content, and power [might be available] … it is helpful to have something to supplant that early childhood model of God."

Including content about the Shekhinah could help people explore God in different ways and increase awareness of avenues and language to describe both the immanence of God and God's compassion. Another participant said, "As a spiritual director. It would be really helpful to have an annotated collection of the texts you just mentioned because I spent a lot of my career as a hospice chaplain, and I often talked about the Spirit of God hovering over your head, but I don't think I ever necessarily named that as Shekhinah." This person knew one of the texts we studied well but had never looked deeply into the naming of Shekhinah in the text, thus skipping over language that may have been helpful in her work.

In reference to text study about the Shekhinah, another person said, "this is information about the understanding of Jewish tradition that I think would be really, really helpful for people, for spiritual directors to know and be able to share when appropriate; I would love those texts." A different person said, "Your idea of spending more time on the image of Shekhinah is a good one. I don't think there was enough in my training." Studying the Shekinah in training programs not only provides access to new language, but it also helps us explore ideas of gender, accompaniment, and Divine presence in new ways.

There was a collective desire through the interviews to explicitly talk about gender, including the potential gender of God, in spiritual direction training. There may be a calling to think about God differently during these times of worldwide violence against humanity; what might a feminine, non-patriarchal spiritual resistance look like? How might bringing a sense of

Divine holy compassion into the world help us create a new paradigm, confronting one set of outdated values while another is waiting to be born? One interviewee said that these conversations also "seem to suggest that God is especially interested in the sick and the vulnerable… that God is the Healer of all flesh." At times of such brokenness, we need the concept of a loving, healing God to give us hope and be with us in our despair. We also need to remember that God accompanies all, including each other in our own sense of vulnerability, shame, and distress.

One participant mused about the presence of God being always around us yet needing to raise our awareness and tune in to the presence in order to fully connect. She said,

> "This is saying when we're most in need of the Divine, the Divine is really, really present. This is interesting because the Divine is with the [sick] person. We don't really invite the Divine in, though we can, but it's more inviting ourselves to open to Divine presence. I mean, that's my theology. [Regarding Talmud Shabbat 12b], this is interesting, it doesn't say this, but it seems to assume that somebody coming in to visit the sick is not necessarily aware of the Divine presence being profoundly there. If we were all aware of this sort of thing all the time, we wouldn't need to be told to not sit here and not sit there."

When we train to become spiritual directors, we learn how to tune in and pay attention to God's presence. Exploring traditional Shekhinah texts together has the potential to expand our awareness of God, God's immanence, and the way in which we may tune in to the presence that is already surrounding us. The same interviewee quoted earlier continued,

> "I'm very struck by the idea of including this more in training for spiritual directors, that we should all have this. It should be part of our Jewish learning. The language… the feminine is one aspect of it, but the other part is of compassion, of presence, and the idea of God being a caring presence. God really is everywhere; there's no place devoid of God. God is God. God is in the places we least expect God to be, when we feel alone, vulnerable, ashamed. It's really important, when we feel at our lowest. The fact that Joseph, [in] the pit, in the prison experience, that's where he found the Divine, and some of the Israeli hostages have talked and written about finding God in the tunnels, in their suffering."

If studying texts about the Shekhinah can help even one person feel held by a compassionate God in their suffering, it is essential learning. Another participant said it best when she said her hope with including more content around the Shekhinah in training programs is to "create a vision for the future based on Shekhinah as a real presence within the world that engages people in a form of hope." May it be so.

Chapter Five

Discussion of Results

I will share conclusions I have drawn from connecting the Shekhinah in Jewish text and history to the ways in which she shows up as the immanent presence of God in the lives of spiritual directors. My goal is to highlight how developing a more intimate understanding of and relationship with the Shekhinah has the capacity to invite deeper spiritual connection and ultimately a more compassionate world.

Alan Morinis relays a Talmudic[131] story based on the verse from Psalms, "I am ever mindful of God's presence,"[132] which states that Rav Chana bar Bizna would recite this verse and say "that one who prays must picture the Shechinah - God's presence - in front of him."[133] Perhaps spiritual direction is its own form of prayer; when we are sitting in holy space with another person, we must picture the Shekhinah before us. In this way, we see the holy in one another and are mindful of God's immanent presence in the process. The interviews conducted revealed that spiritual directors are yearning for this type of education and language, to have new ways to describe and access sacred experiences in spiritual direction.

It is clear that there also is a desire for deeper explorations around gender in spiritual direction programs. Raphael writes, "Often manifest as a shining light, She [Shekhinah] becomes the image of the female aspect of God caring for her people in exile."[134] We see how the compassionate, maternal embrace of the Divine is a powerful portal toward healing. Yet the Shekhinah is not limited by Her feminine care. Scholem teaches, "While the Shekhinah is

[131] Talmud Sanhedrin 22a.
[132] Psalms 16:8 (JPS TANAKH).
[133] Alan Morinis, *Everyday Holiness* (Trumpeter Books, 2008), 241.
[134] Raphael, *Female Face of God*, 82.

predominantly described in feminine symbols, it is not entirely without active, masculine aspects."[135] Indeed, one of the images for Shekhinah is King David himself.[136]

Melinda Ribner reminds us that "feminine energy, Shekhinah in kabbalah, is the energy of receptivity and the masculine energy *Ha Kadosh Baruch Hu* is one of bestowal… men and women contain both masculine and feminine energies within them."[137] Fershtman uses the biblical Joseph narrative to illustrate this point:

> Joseph … integrates masculine and feminine within himself through his deep connection to the feminine quality of receptivity and by using what comes to him in this receptive state to act in the world, an expression of the creative masculine. Joseph heralds a new generation in which it is not the physical union of a man and woman that brings about wholeness, but the unification of the masculine and feminine energies within a single individual. Joseph offers a new model of integration: the individuated self.[138]

If we are intentional about exploration of gender in spiritual direction training programs, we may meaningfully invite spiritual directors to be curious about their own energetic gender expression, ideally leading to deeper awareness, authentic integration, and as Fershtman wisely says, the individuated Self. In order to most fully show up for another person in spiritual direction, we must first be mindful of who we are in the world and quiet the parts that try to distract us from the Holy, integrated work in which we engage.

Accompaniment in Exile / Compassionate Embrace

Additionally, the interviews revealed that the idea of a compassionate God accompanying us in exile is exceptionally meaningful, both in personal spiritual practice and in the practice of spiritual direction. Raphael writes, "Israel's God is nonetheless an accompanying God whose face of presence, as Shekhinah, 'She-Who-Dwells-Among-Us,' goes with Israel, in mourning

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[135] Scholem, *The Mystical Shape*, 186.
[136] See Appendix A.
[137] Melinda Ribner, "Kabbalistic Wisdom and Meditation as a Foundation for Jewish Spiritual Therapy and Direction," in Milgram and Wiener, *Seeking and Soaring*, 161.
[138] Fershtman, *The Mystical Exodus*, 165.

into her deeper exile."[139] Raphael continues, "Shekhinah was present in the exiled body of Israel and the body of Israel was God's dwelling place."[140] As spiritual directors are taught this concept, they have the possibility of offering it as a source of healing to their directees, that God dwells among us and within us.

A spiritual direction colleague shared with me a sacred experience he had in this realm, exploring whether a directee "could feel the presence of the divine in a particular experience, inviting a sense of compassion."[141] This directee was struggling to welcome the compassionate God's presence, knowing that her family had survived the Holocaust. The director gently suggested, "you cannot welcome the God who allowed the Holocaust and your family's suffering." After a period of quiet contemplation, he asked "Is there a different image of God who would be welcome?" The directee spoke, "the God who weeps with us in our suffering." The director offered "do you know who that God is in Jewish wisdom?"[142] The person responded, "the Shekhinah." "Yes," the director responds, "Shekhinah is the Divine Mother who weeps with us and who comforts us. Would you like to be with Her for a moment?" The directee paused, with eyes closed, welcomed stillness, and then a gentle smile emerged. Without this particular spiritual director's knowledge of the Shekhinah as a compassionate God who weeps alongside those who suffer, he would not have been able to companion the directee to the place in which she landed. How beautiful would it be for all spiritual directors to know of the compassionate, immanent God in Jewish tradition as they accompany others.

Frankel also describes an experience bringing the compassionate embrace of the Shekinah to a person with whom she worked, with the pseudonym Rebecca. She described,

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[139] Raphael, *Female Face of God*, 6.
[140] Raphael, 82.
[141] Spiritual director, email message to author, November 5, 2025.
[142] Based on Jeremiah 31:15, see Zohar Va'era 2:29b.

"Wrapped in a *tallit* (prayer shawl), symbolizing the Shechinah's loving and protecting embrace, Rebecca learned to meditate on divine compassion. This practice enabled her to feel more compassion toward herself… experiencing God as the loving and compassionate Shechinah has helped Rebecca differentiate between the echoes of her parents' critical voices and God's truly loving voice within her heart. Rebecca has learned to lovingly embrace and support herself, modeling herself after the Shechinah, who lovingly embraces all those who suffer."[143] Again, Frankel had prior knowledge of the Shekhinah as a compassionate God who holds us with love. With this understanding, she was able to meet Rebecca in her suffering and help bring the compassionate God to her healing journey. For spiritual directors to offer God's compassionate embrace, perhaps even while using a *tallit,* as some interviewees described, they must first come to know about and understand the Shekhinah in Jewish text and mystical tradition.

Rabbi Israel Kestenbaum writes, "The Shechina (G-d's presence) is above the head of the ill. The Rabbis have explained that there is a *galut* (exile) on high that corresponds to Israel's *galut* as a people below. The Shechina itself is in exile, estranged from the fullness of intimacy with the *Ein Sof* (the Infinite One), even as Israel the people are exiled from their land. What abode could be more appropriate for the exiled Shechina than the bedside of the ill, who parallel most poignantly the heartache of estrangement?"[144] While spiritual directees are not always battling physical or emotional illness, we all experience exiles, the feeling of not belonging, the disconnection from the Holy, the distance from our truest Self. As the Shekhinah dwells at the bedside of the ill, so too She dwells with us in the way estrangement manifests in our lives. And for our directees who are living with chronic illness, pain, and emotional distress, all the more so

[143] Frankel, *Sacred Therapy*, 192.
[144] Israel Kestenbaum, "The Gift of Healing Relationship: A Theology of Jewish Pastoral Care," in *Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources*, ed. Dayle Friedman (Jewish Lights, 2001), 6.

may we learn to recognize the Shekhinah's presence there, reminding those who need it most that they are never alone.

The book of Jonah states, "In my trouble I called to Adonai, and Adonai answered me, and [He] answered me; from the belly of Sheol I cried out, and You heard my voice."[145] In this verse, Adonai is spelled *Yud Hey Vav Hey.* According to Fershtman, the *Hey* in *Yud Hey Vav Hey* represents the Shekhinah.[146] She is the one to whom we call. May we know how to call out, and may we find the loving, compassionate, presence of God, the Shekhinah, to meet us there, to listen to our distress, and to answer us. As our Souls are heard, so are we better able to become that which we are destined to be, our truest Selves, unburdened by the parts that suppress our light, revealing ourselves to the world. In order to recognize and feel the presence of the Shekhinah, we must first remind spiritual directors that the indwelling, immanent God is a core concept throughout Jewish history.

The Indwelling God

Rogers reminds us of Spiritual "In-direction." He explains that spiritual directors do not direct people to God. Rather, they help to direct people's attention to the God already present with them."[147] This idea is closely connected to the idea that the Shekhinah is the indwelling God, the One Who dwells within us. Hellner-Eshed writes, "Shekhinah's abode is to be human beings themselves, who through their worship and service transform themselves into sanctuaries in which Shekhinah can dwell."[148] Barbara Breitman shares, "As we offer and enable our being to touch another, we enable that aspect of God Who dwells among us, the Shechina, the

[145] Jonah 2:2 (JPS TANAKH).
[146] Fershtman*, The Mystical Exodus*, 152.
[147] Rogers, *Supervision Training,* 6.
[148] Heller-Eshed, *A River Flows*, 116.

indwelling presence, to become manifest."[149] What is spiritual direction if not a space whereby we may enable the Shekhinah to become manifest, in the context of offering our full Selves to another? If we learn we are sanctuaries whereby the Shekinah can dwell, we must talk about what that means and how to maintain presence as spiritual directors in order to be channels for the Divine. While spiritual direction programs do touch upon this goal, they do so without explicitly mentioning or studying about the Shekhinah. Certainly, adding this curricular material would only serve to enrich the training experience.

In our studies of the Shekhinah and raising awareness of Her presence, Rabbi Nancy Flam cautions, "We should be very careful not to take the place of the Shechina. We should not get in the Shechina's way."[150] Another key component of spiritual direction training programs is welcoming God's presence without inserting our own agendas. Scholem teaches, "God's dwelling or Shekhinah means [God's] visible or hidden presence in a given place, [God's] immediacy."[151] He reminds us that "the Shekhinah is always God,"[152] noting the unification and Oneness of God even if only one aspect is discernible to us at any given time. While God may be hidden or discernable at different points in spiritual direction, God is always there, with the potential to manifest as the Shekhinah, God's ability to meet us immanently, compassionately, in the places in which we find ourselves.

Rabbi Kalonyus Kalman Shapira, the Rabbi of the Warsaw Ghetto, reminded people of the ever-present Shekhinah even in times of unimaginable destruction. He asked people to identify sacred places to meet, writing, "The place where you meet will come to be regarded by

[149] Barbara Eve Breitman, "Foundations of Jewish Pastoral Care: Skills and Techniques," in Friedman, *Jewish pastoral care,* 79.
[150] Nancy Flam, "Spiritual Nurture for Jewish Pastoral Caregivers," in Friedman, *Jewish pastoral care*, 173.
[151] Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape,* 147.
[152] Scholem, 148.

the group as a place of sanctity, a place that intersects eternity… an access point for the Shechinah - the presence of God - which is palpably present there." [153] Spiritual direction training programs talk about how to create welcoming spaces for the work; it is essential to be reminded that we have within our power the possibility of creating "places of sanctity," which may serve as "access points for the Shekhinah." In our hospitality, we are not only offering candles and soft lighting, but we are also opening space where the Holy may dwell. As we welcome the Shekhinah into the practice of spiritual direction practice, so may we find Her there.

[153] Kalonyus Kalman Shapira, *Conscious Community: A Guide to Inner Work*, trans. Andrea Cohen-Kiener (Rowman & Littlefield, 1996), 96.

Chapter Six

Conclusion and Recommendations

This project highlights the need for learning around the Shekhinah to be included in spiritual direction training programs. It is clear that studying Shekhinah texts in the context of such training programs has the capacity to expand trainee's awareness around the immanence of God as well as the compassionate, caring face of the Divine. These texts also help people explore what exile means, how the Shekhinah has traditionally met the Jewish people in exile, and how She may continue to accompany us in our present day physical, spiritual, and psychosocial exiles. The interviews from this project reveal the sacredness of sharing personal narratives around how people have experienced the Shekhinah's presence in their personal spiritual lives. If we open up the conversation around the Shekhinah in spiritual direction training programs, we also make it known that these spaces are safe to share such holy, tender moments with one another.

While the immanence of God is surely introduced in other ways in spiritual direction training programs, incorporating the Shekhinah allows Jewish programs to ground Divine immanence in Jewish tradition, while providing new stories and language for the experience of the accompanying God. Traditional Jewish texts about the Shekhinah also help provide access to a compassionate God, One Who companions us in exile, weeping alongside us in our suffering. Spiritual direction programs would be wise to include some of these Shekhinah texts in their training. Such texts enable students to explore and wrestle with these ancient words, ultimately eliciting insight into how these concepts may be applied to their spiritual lives and the practice of spiritual direction. Appendix A includes a number of these core texts, including, "There is no

place empty of Shekhinah,"[154] "Wherever Israel went in exile, Shekhina was with them,"[155] and "The Shekhinah rests above the head of a sick person."[156] Additionally, it is essential to introduce the text from which Shekhinah is derived from Torah, "They shall build for me a sanctuary, and I shall dwell within them."[157] There is much to be discovered from exploring alternate translations of this verse indicating how the Shekhinah dwells within us, and how we may meet Her there, particularly while sitting with another in spiritual direction.

My hope is that Jewish Spiritual Direction training programs will consider including intentional curriculum around the Shekhinah for future cohorts, and that Her name will be accessible to all spiritual directors, especially if She is the One to whom they or their directees seek to call. The Shekhinah has been with the Jewish people always, yet we too often have forgotten to awaken our own awareness of Her presence. May this be a time of remembering - remembering that the compassionate God is available to us always, that we are worthy of Her compassion, and that the practice of spiritual direction may be a place where She is revealed.

Rogers says, "the process of compassion is really a process of recovery – of retrieving an inherent capacity that has become, either in the moment or over time, buried and obscured."[158] The process of recovery speaks to my soul, particularly around the Jewish processes of *teshuvah*, return, and *zikaron*, remembrance. When we recover that which is already there, our Self compassion along with the Shekhinah's compassionate embrace, we engage in both *remembering* our inherent good as well as *returning* to that place of light. The practice of

[154] Pesikta D'Rav Kahana 1.2.
[155] Talmud Megillah 29a.
[156] Talmud Shabbat 12b.
[157] Exodus 25:8 (JPS TANAKH).
[158] Rogers, "Practicing Compassion," 60.

spiritual direction helps ground us in the ever-accessible light of the Sacred, both within and around our Selves.

The Angel Blessing is my personal favorite prayer, one we sang to each of my children as they received their Hebrew names. It is also traditionally said at the end of each day, before sleep, to invite the protection of the angels. Above all, it welcomes the Shekhinah to rest above our heads. It reads:

> "In the name of Adonai:
> May the angel Michael be at your right
> And the angel Gabriel be at your left
> And in front of you the angel Uriel
> And behind you the angel Rafael
> And above your head the Shechinah (Divine Presence)."[159]

May the Shekhinah rest above our heads always, may we feel Her presence at moments of awakening, and may we know that we have the ability to return to Her protective care at any moment. May we invite new content into our spiritual direction training programs, so that we all may have access to language and theology that welcome the compassionate, immanent Divine presence, that open our hearts to the ever-present Shekhinah. May it be so.

[159] Bruce Feldstein, "Angel Blessing," The Jewish Chaplaincy at Stanford University Medical Center, accessed November 22, 2025, https://stanfordhealthcare.org/content/dam/SHC/patientsandvisitors/spiritual-care/docs/angelblessing.pdf.

Appendix A: Shekhinah Source Sheet

Images and Symbols of the Shekhinah:

Earth, Moon, Hind, Doe, Garden, Rose, Stone, Sea, Pool, Cistern and Well, Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, Zion, Adonai, Rachel, King David, Shekhinah, Keneset Yisra'el (Assembly of Israel), Female, Bride, Land, Queen, Matronita, Diadem, Vulva/Female Genitals, Mouth, Justice (Tsedeq), Jerusalem, Gate, Opening of the Eyes, Speech (Dibbur),
Oral Torah, West, Behemot (Beast/Beasts) Crouching on a Thousand Mountains, Womb, Cave, Azure (Tekhelet), Purple (Argaman), Speculum/Mirror that Does not Shine, El Shaddai

1) **There is no place empty of Shekhina**

   Pesikta D'Rav Kahana 1.2: King Solomon made for himself a palanquin…within, it was decked with love (3:9). R. Azaria taught in the name of R. Yehuda ben Simon that this refers to Shekhina.R. Acha son of Kahana said, I will come to you there (in the Mishkan-Exodus 25:22) – this teaches that even behind the curtain (in the Mishkan) it is not empty of Shekhina. Rabban Gamiliel was asked why the Holy Blessed One appeared to Moses in a bush. He answered, "in order to teach that there is no place in the world empty of Shekhina." R. Yehoshua of Sikhnin taught in the name of R. Levi: to what can the Tent of Meeting be compared? To a cave along the seashore; when the waves from into the cave, but the ocean is not depleted. In this way the Tent of Meeting was filled with the radiance of Shekhina.

2) **Wherever Israel went in exile, Shekhina was with them**. (Talmud Megillah 29a)

   It is taught in a baraita: Rabbi Shimon ben Yoḥai says: Come and see how beloved the Jewish people are before the Holy One, Blessed

be He. In every place they were exiled, the Shekhina went with them. They were exiled to Egypt, and the Shekhina went with them, as it is stated: "Did I reveal myself to the house of your father when they were in Egypt?" (I Samuel 2:27). They were exiled to Babylonia, and the Shekhina went with them, as it is stated: "For your sake I have sent to Babylonia" (Isaiah 43:14). So too, when, in the future, they will be redeemed, the Shekhina will be with them, as it is stated: "Then the Lord your God will return with your captivity" (Deuteronomy 30:3). It does not state: He will bring back, i.e., He will cause the Jewish people to return, but rather it says: "He will return," which teaches that the Holy One, Blessed be He, will return together with them from among the various exiles.

3) **The Shekhinah rests above the head of a sick person**. (Talmud Shabbat 12b)

Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Anyone who requests that his needs be met in the Aramaic language, the ministering angels do not attend to him to bring his prayer before God, as the ministering angels are not familiar with the Aramaic language, but only with the sacred tongue, Hebrew, exclusively. The Gemara responds: A sick person is different. He does not need the angels to bring his prayer before God because the Shekhina is with him… That was also taught in a baraita: One who enters to visit the sick person should sit neither on the bed nor on a chair; rather, he should wrap himself in his prayer shawl with trepidation and awe, and sit before the sick person below him, as the Shekhina is above the head of the sick person, as it is stated: "YHVH will support him on the bed of illness."

4) Jewish legend maintains that after the Temple was destroyed, the *Kadosh Baruch Hu*, the masculine presence of the divine, left the earthly realm, dwelling in the loftiest heavens. **The Shekhinah remained as the "sole worldly presence of holiness, compassion, and providence for the Jewish people."** Without a dwelling place, Zohar scholar Melila Heller-Eshed suggests that the Shekhinah seeks to dwell in people's hearts.
5) "Rabbi Halafta of Kefar Hanania said: when ten sit together and occupy themselves with Torah, the Shechinah abides among them, as it is said: "God stands in the congregation of God" (Pirkei Avot 3:6).
6) Torah in Exodus 25:8, "**They shall build for me a sanctuary, and I shall dwell within them.**" This verse is standardly translated as God dwelling "among them," and comes from the Hebrew verb *lishkon*, to dwell. Shekhinah translated as the presence of God dwelling among us shifts that meaning from the original Hebrew, **Shekhinah dwelling *within* us.**
7) Rabbi Leah Novick writes, "Shekhinah is the light closest to God and yet is accessible in some way to human consciousness."

Appendix B: Interview Questions

What inspired you to want to be interviewed for this project?

Were the texts we just explored your first introduction to Shekhinah?

If not, where did you first learn about Her? What were your held beliefs or understanding about Her?

What do you think of when you hear the word, Shekhinah?

Was there any mention of Shekhinah in your spiritual direction training program?

Where have you experienced the compassionate presence of God in your life?

Can you describe the experience? How did it feel?

Do you experience the masculine and feminine presence of God in different ways?

How does the presence of Shekhinah inform your work with directees?

How might you carry what you learned today into your work with directees or into your own spiritual practice?

What are your big dreams for how what we discussed today may be carried into spiritual direction training programs in the future?

Glossary of Hebrew Terms

Ayeh? - where?; often rhetorical

Chesed - lovingkindness; in mussar practice, may be experienced as kindness one gives without the expectation of anything in return[160]

Ehyeh - A Hebrew verb meaning I am or I will be; The name of God in Torah revealed to Moses in Exodus 3:14

Ein Sof - the Infinite One in Jewish mysticism

El Malei Rahamim - God full of compassion, the name of a prayer often recited at Jewish funerals

Elohim - a Hebrew name for God, grammatically plural

Galui - open, revealed, from the same root as *galut*

Galut - Exile or Diaspora, from the Hebrew root to remove or reveal; the experience of the Jewish people being in exile from the land of Israel after the destruction of the Temple; may also refer to spiritual exile

HaShem - literally "The Name," a name for God, may be used to substitute the unpronounceable tetragram

Kabbalah - receiving; a school of Jewish mystical thought, peaking in the 12th and 13th centuries

Kadosh Baruch Hu - The Holy Blessed One, a name for God, grammatically masculine

Kavod - Honor; Glory; shares a Hebrew root with heavy/weight, may allude to spiritual weightiness

Lishkon - to dwell or reside, the biblical Hebrew root for the Shekhinah

Malkhut - Kingdom, lowest (10th) sefirah on the Tree of Life in Kabbalah

[160] Alan Morinis, *Everyday Holiness* (Trumpeter Books, 2008), 187.

Mashgiach - supervisor; someone who oversees Kosher food production

Mashgiach Ruhani - spiritual supervisor

Mekom Kevodo - the place of His (God's) glory

Merkavah - Chariot, particularly connected to prophetic visions in the book of Ezekiel

Mishkan - Tabernacle, referring to portable sanctuary for God, from the Hebrew verb to dwell

Mitzvot - Commandments, 613 in Torah, often referred to as "good deeds"

Peh - Mouth

Rachamim - Compassion, from the same Hebrew root as, *rechem*, womb

Rachmana - The Compassionate One, emphasizing God's compassion, from the root *rachamim*

Rechem - Womb, shares a root with *rachamim*, compassion

Sefirot - ten manifestations of God, collectively creating the tree of life in Jewish mysticism

Shefa - Abundance, Divine Flow

Shekhinah / Shechinah / Shekina* - Divine immanence, from the Hebrew verb *lishkon*, to dwell

Shleimut - Wholeness, shares a Hebrew root with the word *shalom*, peace

Tallit - prayer shawl

Teshuvah - Return, often referred to as repentance

Yeshivot - plural of yeshiva, traditional Jewish place of education

Zichronah livracha - may her memory be a blessing

Zohar - Light, Splendor, foundational written work of Kabbalah, composed in the 13th century

Zot - This, representing a single, feminine, noun

* In this project, I use the transliteration Shekhinah to represent the Hebrew word, *Shin, Chaf, Yud, Nun, Yeh.* When sharing direct quotes from other sources, I use the spelling from the original source, including Shechinah and Shekina.

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